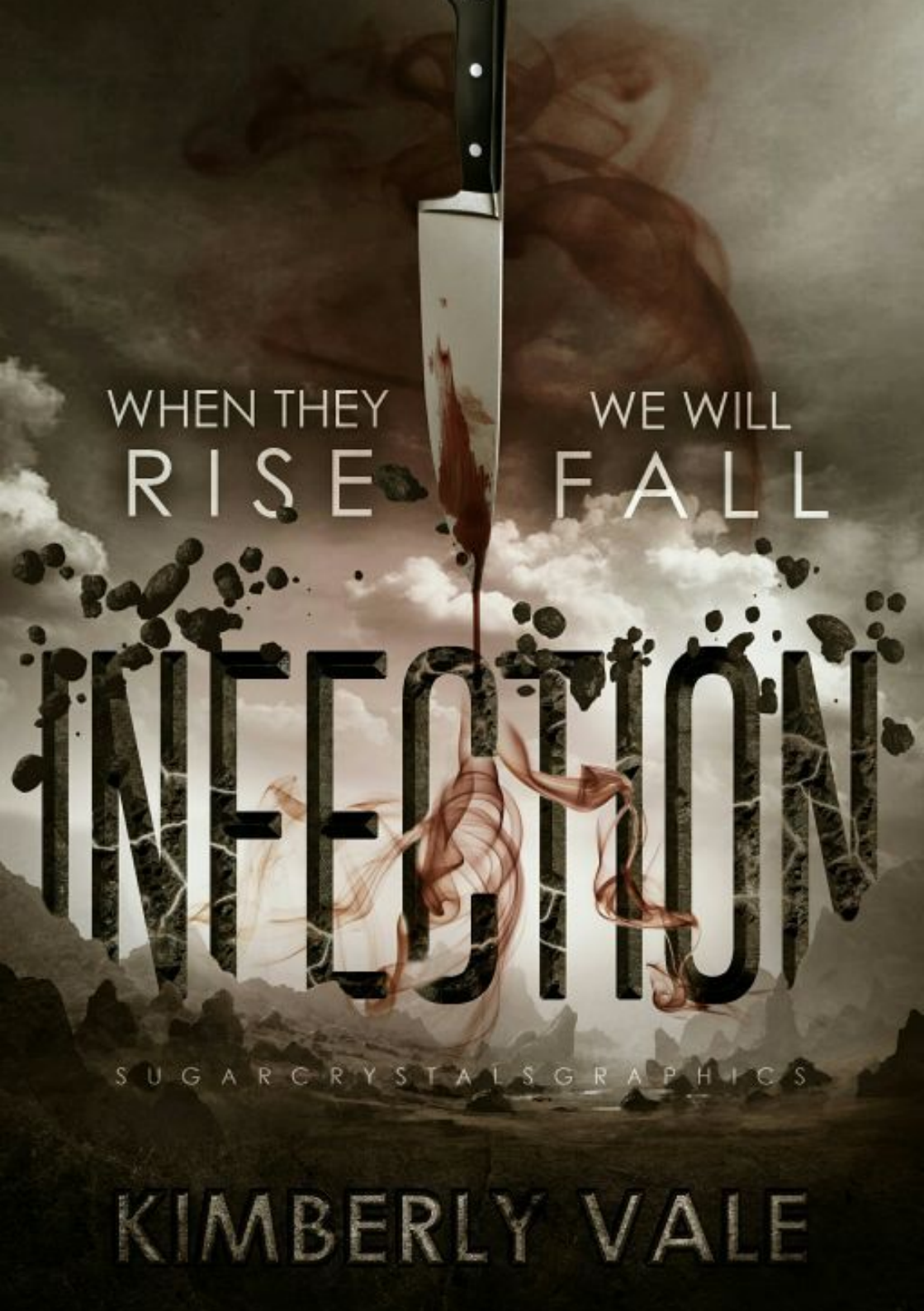
WHEN THEY RISE
WE WILL FALL
INFECTION
SUGARCRYSTALSGRAPHICS
KIMBERLY VALE

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Infection |Infected Book 1|

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Chapter 1

• Note •

INFECTION

A republishing of the original 2009 version , and the slightly better rewritten beginning.

It will be cringey. It will be messy. It was the first thing I ever wrote back when I was a teen, so prepare your eyes beforehand.

You've been warned.

But seriously. It took a lot for me to even republish this book because it is that badly written, but I don't want to ever be ashamed of anything I've written and hope that my own growth can inspire new

writers to continue to keep pushing and grow themselves.

Chapter 2

Part One

Fear is a slowly twisted knife to the gut.

Fear is an illusion, warping my mind into a weak thing.

Fear is an infection, tainting my blood.

But I will no longer be afraid.

Fear will not control me

Chapter 3

(1) Adrenaline

Screams.

Screams fill my dream. Horrible painful cries ring through the air sounding far away, yet close enough to make my skin crawl. I can't tell where they are coming from, but they seem to be getting closer and closer until one pierces my ears, startling me awake.

I sit up straight in my bed, running my fingers through my hair, brushing the messy blonde waves away from my face. Sweat beads at my temples and drenches my body, making the material of my shirt stick uncomfortably to my back. My heart refuses to calm from its rapid beating, no matter how many

deep breaths I take. The dream felt so real--the leave-my-body-trembling kind of real. Shaking my head, I try to erase the sound of the screams from my dream, but they continue to replay in my mind.

"Get out of my head," I say, massaging the sides of my skull. It's normal for people to talk to themselves, right?

I glance around my room, forgetting that I was back home for the weekend. I attend college at a university only two hours away from my hometown. I visit when I can and on this particular weekend I *had* to get away. It is nice to not be cramped inside that small-ass dorm room with a weird girl that constantly talks about how the end was near. Yeah, right.

Trying to distract myself doesn't work. The screams inside my head get louder, almost as if they are right outside my window. Another sound joins the internal screams and my heart races even faster as I hear tires squeal against the pavement outside.

Throwing back the comforter on my bed, I spring to the window, my fingers slicing between the blinds.

My eyes dart left and right through the crack as my breath fogged up the glass. The window of my room is on the side of the house, but in the distance I can see the road that curves, leading away from our neighborhood. A car drives erratically around the corner, disappearing from my sight.

Then a woman runs into my vision, sprinting across the field next to the house. Blood soaks her clothes and terror fills her features. My heart had been racing before, but now it completely stops as if someone controlling my body had stomped on the brakes. I don't even breathe as I watch the woman run away from the neighborhood, vanishing around the bend in the road.

Then I remember the scream that startled me awake. Realization dawns on me.

Shit.

It wasn't a dream at all.

I back away from the window, nausea rolling through my stomach.

"Mom!" I yell, spinning towards my door. "Dad!"

When I get no answer, I rush through my door, out into the hallway, and down the stairs, the hem of my very over-sized white T-shirt tickling my naked legs.

When I get to the bottom of our wide oak staircase, I know something is wrong. The house is too quiet. *Way too quiet.* Every morning since I can remember I wake up to two things. One--Mom *trying* to make breakfast in the kitchen. The scent of burnt pancakes and eggs always manage to fill up the entire house. Two--Dad belting classic rock songs during whatever he was doing, whether it is showering, taking out the trash, or organizing his record collection. Even though I am barely home anymore, when I *am* there, they carry on, truly making me feel like I am home again.

I stand there, praying for Mom's cooking attempt to hit me or for Dad's off-tune vocals to reach my ear. No whiff of food comes my way. All I can hear is a completely dead, utterly scary silence.

"Mom?" I ask again, my voice echoing off of the walls. "Dad?"

Tremors shake my hands and knees as I walk towards the kitchen. I wonder whether I should call out for them again in case they can't hear me. Then again, I have seen enough scary movies that I figure it is probably smartest to keep my mouth shut and make as little noise as possible. Visions of the bloody woman down the road fill my mind and my face starts to clam up.

Pressing my hand against the swinging door that separates our dining room from our kitchen, I slowly press it open. The scaredy-cat inside of me claws to the surface as I brace myself for something to jump out at me. My shoulders tense and my eyes narrow. I relax the tiniest bit when I see that the kitchen is empty. My eyes trail from the closed refrigerator, across the breakfast nook, and to the vacant stove-top. There is no sign that anyone has even been in the kitchen.

Just when I am about to turn around and go find my phone, a flash of red catches my eye. A couple of feet away from me, a puddle of blood contrasts violently against the white tiled floor. I stumble backwards

into the door, almost falling through it until I brace my hands on the frame, pulling my body back up.

My heart pounds so hard in my chest, I feel like it will burst. Adrenaline takes over my body. My shaking hands wind themselves into my hair, my head shaking back and forth.

This can't be happening.

The screams. The car. The woman. My parents. The blood. Something terrible is going on.

My eyes widen as I notice the edge of the puddle is smeared into the floor, trailing past the stove and around the counter, disappearing. Forcing my legs to move, I tiptoe to the drawer next to the stove and pull out the first knife I grab. I can't see myself actually using it. I was never a fighter. I always take the first opportunity to fly. Nevertheless, I feel more at ease with a weapon in my hand.

"Come on, Desi," I whisper to myself. "Grow a pair."

Time ticks by so slowly as I follow the trail to the other door of the kitchen, the one leading to the back hallway. I creep to the door and press my ear against

the wood, trying to hear for any movement, talking , *anything* at this point. I hear sluggish footsteps on the other side and a dragging sound, almost as if the person walking is dragging their feet behind them. Gathering up all the courage that I can, I grab the doorknob and twist, slowly opening the door. In the hall with her back to me, is Mom. My grip on the knife loosens, sending it clattering to the floor.

"Mom!" I yell, my voice filling with relief. "I've been calling for you! There's blood all..." My voice trails as I become unable to speak, taking in the scene in front of me.

The blood carried and spread from the kitchen into the hallway, making a trail to her dragging feet which were also caked in scarlet. As my eyes move up Mom's body, I spot where the blood is coming from.

Slowly, she turns around to face me, revealing the mess. Blood streams out of every hole on her face, caking into the ends of her matted blonde hair at her shoulders. When her eyes met mine, her breathing increases rapidly. I step towards her but she reaches out an arm to stop me.

"I don't know why this is happening," Mom says, her voice rough and scratchy. "I took the vaccine like they told me to do. This shouldn't be happening to me."

I take a step forward and she panics.

"Don't!" she yells, her eyes widening, more tears of blood running down her cheeks. "Do not come any closer. You could catch it!" A fit of coughing overcomes her, blood spewing out of her mouth.

"We have to get you to a hospital," I say frantically, trying to keep my voice calm, but failing miserably. "Where's Dad?" I step towards her again, my arms reaching out for her.

Mom quickly jerks away, stepping back into the wall behind her. "A hospital can't help me. No one can help me." More blood runs down from her nose and eyes. Her body is quivering. "You need to help yourself and get out of this house."

"Stop it," I say, continuing to step forward. "You're scaring me. Where is Dad?" My voice starts to shake and my stomach tightens with unease.

"Your dad..." Mom's voice gives out as she curls into the wall, away from me. She clears her throat. "Your dad is upstairs. He felt as bad as I did this morning. *Do not go up there.* I'm going to tell you one last time to get out of this house."

"Tell me what's going on!" My hands are shaking. If I was scared before, now I am terrified. "I can't just leave you here to bleed to death! Stay here, I'm getting you a rag and I'm calling an ambulance."

Just as I turn to race back into the kitchen, Mom's scream stopps me dead in my tracks. I spin back around and watch her body crumble to the floor as if she is a rag doll, her knees and head knocking against the wood floor with a deafening crack. I am paralyzed where I stand. I can't run to help her, or even see if she is okay. I can't run like she begged me to do just a moment ago. I just stand there, motionless, trying to gulp down air that refuses to fill my lungs. I am useless.

I am sure she is dead. I am so positive that I just saw my mother die in front of me from something that was supposed to prevent her death. I'm not sure how

long I stand there, numb and stupid. It could have been seconds or minutes that went by before anything happens.

Mom's head twitches, making my heart start beating again, and slowly lifts to look at me. The first thing I notice that is different are her eyes. The sky blue eyes she had passed down to me, darkens into a midnight black, her pupils dilating over her irises. Her gaze stares into mine with a hunger that I only recognize in animals.

I step backwards, knowing that whatever is going on with Mom is definitely something that I need to get away from, fast, just like she had told me to do. When she sees my movement, she lets loose a growl and jumps onto her feet like she was never sick in the first place. Whoever this is in front of me, isn't my mother anymore. No, she is gone and in her place is something unimaginable. She inhales deeply as if she is getting my scent and screams as she leaps towards me, snapping her jaw like a carnivorous beast.

I turn, slamming into the door of the kitchen and run, my bare feet slapping hard against the tile floor.

I slip in the puddle of blood, falling hard to my knees, my wrists hyper-extending painfully as I brace my fall. Mom falls onto the floor behind me. I scramble, feeling Mom's fingernails graze my ankles as she tries to grab for me. I kick one leg backwards, knocking my heel against her jaw.

As Mom flies back, I get to my feet and run through the swinging door, through the dining room, and into the living room, leaving a trail of bloody footprints in my wake. In a moment of overwhelming need to get away, I run for the stairs, not even thinking about the fact that Mom told me Dad was up there. I hear Mom barrel through the kitchen door, growling and snarling as she races after me. Just as I reach the top floor, her struggling on the stairs reaches my ear. I dare to glance behind me and the terrifying sight of seeing her practically crawling up after me is enough to push me forward into a sprint towards my bedroom.

I slam my door shut behind me, using all of my strength to push my dresser in front of the door, hoping it will hold her back. I spin around, spotting

my cell phone on the nightstand next to my bed. Ripping the charger out, I quickly dial the emergency hotline and hold the phone against my ear. The sound I hear on the other end made my blood run cold. The monotonous beep of a busy signal fills my ear. I drop the phone to the floor with a thud, feeling too many things at once.

I want to scream. I want to curl into a ball under my bed and hope for the best. I want to wake up from this bad dream. Most of all, I want to cry. But I can't. Right now, the only thought running through my head is: *survival, survival, survival.*

A furious pounding against my door snaps me out of my stupor. I circle my room as if my escape will magically appear. A second pair of fists joins the first, as the door starts to crack. A pair of screams ring out on the other side, one of them deeper than the other's.

Dad has joined Mom.

**

A/N: Thanks for reading chapter 1 of Infection. If you like what you read, leave a comment or give it a vote. Be sure to add the story to your library if you want to be notified of updates.

Old chapters are also being republished and are marked as "(old)"

Question time!

Did you read the original Infection? If so, what did you think of the changes? Based on hints within the chapter, how do you think the infection started? Will Desi get out alive?

Chapter 4

(2) Murderer

I eye my car keys on the nightstand next to my bed, knowing that I have to leave. There is no helping my parents. The pounding against the door continues and finally a bloody fist breaks through. Dad's face fills the hole in the door--his eyes black, his face filled with rage.

My eyes stay glued on him as he continues to break through the door, pushing against the dresser. Mom is trying to shove her way through right with him. I reach for my keys, grasping them tightly in the same hand that is holding my phone. Stepping backwards, I slide my empty hand behind me, keeping my eyes on the *strangers* in front of me, and crack the

window open. I turn my body so that I can open it all the way. My only option is to jump out of the window.

I can't leave without one last confirmation. "Daddy?" I ask, my voice quivering with the slim hope that maybe I am wrong about all of this, that maybe I am still dreaming.

They both stop, silence overwhelming the bedroom that was once my sanctuary. Then suddenly the silence is cut off by blood-curdling screams erupting from both of them. Dad's eyes stay locked on me as he uses all of his strength to push the dresser over, bursting into a sprint towards me.

I fling myself out of the window without a second thought, landing on my feet and bending my knees. My momentum shifts me forward and I roll into the wet morning grass. Then I watch in horror, as my dad, my hero, launches himself out of the window with his arms and legs flailing around him. I can't hold in my scream any longer.

My scream pierces through the front yard, stopping when Dad's body hit the ground with a thud, His

head twists at a grotesque angle. His back and neck breaks with a loud crack.

My shaking hand reaches out to touch him, hovering in the air as I wrestle with the emotions inside of me. I don't want to leave Dad lying there. I don't want to, but I have to. Something is horribly wrong and I am not safe here.

Dad continues to growl even though he is paralyzed. He isn't even moaning in pain.

Screams erupting through the morning air snaps me out of it and brings me to my feet quickly. I snatch my car keys and phone that had fallen out of my grasp during the fall and grip them tightly, the teeth of the keys digging into the flesh of my palm. I run around the side of the house, towards the driveway, my eyes scanning every inch of our front yard for anyone that might attack me. Cries for help and painful wails continue in the neighborhood around me. I want to help them badly, but if I want to stay alive I have to get to my car.

And there it is, my red BMW, sitting untouched and beckoning for me to climb in the front seat and drive

away as far as possible. I close the distance between my getaway and me, my nervous hands fumbling for the unlock button on my keys. I pull open the door with such force that it comes back and hits me in the shin, making me cry out as I throw my body into the driver's seat.

Putting the keys in the ignition, I rev the engine, finding relief when it starts with ease. I lock the doors, shift the car in reverse, and back out of the driveway, my tires squealing as I try to gun it down the road. Soon I find that I won't be getting anywhere very fast as I witness the chaos surrounding me.

A woman is in her yard with three men around her, one I recognize as Mr. Johansen, Dad's friend. The men are ripping into her with their teeth, the woman screaming as she falls limp and bloody in their arms.

A man runs across the street, right in front of my car, his handgun pointing at the pack of men. His hope is to save the woman, but every shot is useless--the bullets embedding into the side of the house or shooting out the windows instead. I watch in horror as the men drop the woman. I gasp when I notice

that her bones are showing. The men turn their attention towards the shooting gun, charging at the man wielding it. He brings the gun to his temple and ends his own life without hesitation.

My hand covers my mouth, holding in a scream that threatens to escape. My foot slams on the brake, stopping the car entirely. Cars in the street are wrecked and abandoned, a couple of them on fire, all looking like the people who were driving them were trying to escape like me. Dead bodies are littered on the streets and yards, some of them still moving even though it is impossible for them to be alive.

The ground is painted red.

Suddenly, a fierce knocking on my passenger window has me screaming. I glance over, my foot loose on the brake, ready to put the pedal to metal if need be. The girl standing at the window is banging against the glass with tears streaming down her face.

"Please!" she shrieks, trying for the door handle to see if my car is unlocked. "Let me in! Help me!"

I debate what to do for a second too long as an elderly woman appears behind the girl and bites into her shoulder, dragging her away from my car. I fumble with my door handle, ready to go help the girl when my phone starts to ring on the passenger seat.

I dive for the phone, seeing my friend Adriana's name and picture light up the screen. I breathe a small sigh of relief and drag my finger across the screen.

"Adriana!" I yell. "Thank God!"

"Desi?" Adriana whispers, her voice barely audible. I turn the volume up on my phone to hear her better. "What the hell is going on?"

"I-I don't know," I reply, starting to drive again. "Where are you at?"

"I'm at my house." I can tell Adriana was whimpering now. Why am I not whimpering? Because of all the adrenaline? What will happen to me when it faded?

"I'm holed up in my bathroom," Adriana says. "Everyone's trying to kill me."

"Don't worry," I tell her, taking a right turn, trying to avoid the people running towards my car, either hoping to get a ride or get *me* . "I'm on my way to you."

"Hurry." Adriana's voice is shaking, even as she whispers. "My little brother is clawing at the door."

~~~

Pulling my car into Adriana's driveway, my eyes scan out the windows, checking to see if the coast is clear. The sun is drying the dew that covers the grass and the leaves on the trees--the only normal thing about this morning. I see people running in the distance. I hear their screams through the closed windows of my car. Taking a deep breath, I look towards the wide open front door to Adriana's house and reach for the car door handle.

As soon as I step out of the car and close the door, a growl sounds from behind me. Scared to move too fast, I turn around slowly and recognize Tristan, Adriana's boyfriend, standing a few yards away from me. Only it isn't really him anymore. This definitely is
~~~

not the Tristan that I had hung out with many times before.

Tristan glares at me from underneath his dark hair, his eyes black like Mom and Dad's were. He is breathing through clenched teeth, his chest rising up and down intensely. I lift my foot and step around the car very timidly. Tristan watches me, a snarl starting to rise in his throat.

"Tristan," I say, trying to keep my voice from shaking. "It's me. It's Desi." I keep stepping, very slowly, around the front of my car, increasing the distance between us.

Tristan's head eerily follows me, the rest of his body going completely still. His breathing stops. I can tell he is about to attack from his stance and I glance to the open door wondering how quickly I can get there.

Before I let Tristan's growling get any louder, I dig my toes into the pavement and bolt around the front of my car. I sprint to the front steps of Adriana's house, the sound of Tristan clomping after me making me run faster. Doing what you should never do when

you're running from something, I glance over my shoulder. In that one moment that I look behind me, seeing how terrifyingly close Tristan was, I ironically trip over the last step and fall through the wide open front door.

My hands slap down hard against the wood floor. I quickly roll over onto my back and kick the front door closed, leaving Tristan trapped outside. I wince as he scratches the door and pounds against it, screaming with fury. I try to gasp for air as I look around the inside of Adriana's house.

I glance around the living room, seeing papers strewn all over the rug. The coffee table lays on its side, blood smeared across the wood. The dining room chairs are all turned over, drinking glasses shattered to bits on the wood floor. I stand up on my feet, still hearing Tristan attack the front door, desperately trying to get to me. My eyes fall on the staircase, seeing the bloody trail that scales the steps. *I need to protect myself.*

I walk through the destroyed dining room, careful not to step onto the glass with my bare feet. If

Adriana's brother is in the house and is trying to attack her like everyone else I came into contact with, then her mom was either dead or just like them. As if on cue, I hear footsteps.

I don't care about being quiet any longer as I imagine the owner of the footsteps snarling and covered in blood. A piece of glass crackles under my foot and I bite my lip to hold in a scream of pain. I quickly limp around the dining room table and through the archway to the kitchen. I stand in the middle with my head frantically turning side to side, trying to remember where Adriana's mom kept the knives.

The footsteps near the kitchen. I somehow control my panic and the fragmented thoughts in my mind click together. I run to the side of the stove, wincing with every step, and grab the top knife out of the large wooden block, hoping it will be the biggest one. I nearly kiss the blade when I see it is a large butcher knife.

From behind me a woman screams, making me drop the knife. Time flies in slow motion as I watch my weapon clatter to the floor, the silver of the blade

glinting in the light as it bounces back and forth on the tile. My eyes travel up to see Adriana's mom, Julie, in the archway of the kitchen with what looks like bite-marks covering her arms. Blood stained her skin. Her curly black hair is wild around her face which is filled with frightening rage.

Without warning, Julie lunges toward me, closing the small gap between us. Her teeth bare at me as I throw myself to the ground, gripping the knife in my hand. I close my eyes and hold my sharp weapon out in front of me, cringing as she runs into the blade.

A sharp breath leaves Julie, but she doesn't fall over like I assumed she would. Instead she keeps snapping her jaw at me as I lock my arms, holding her back while I still grip the knife. Placing one hand against her chest, I yank the knife out of her with all of my strength. My cowardice takes over as I close my eyes again, slamming the knife down into her.

Julie's snarling stops, her weight leaning away from me. I crack open an eye and yelp when I see my knife sticking out of her right eye. Blood flows like a river down her cheek, dripping onto my arm and hand

that is holding her back. Julie's legs give out underneath her and she falls to the ground, the knife still sticking out of her face.

I lean back against the cabinet, my legs curling around me as I struggle to breathe.

The tremors in my hands begin to move throughout my arms and my teeth chatter as if I am cold. I can't take my eyes off of Julie's lifeless body and the blood that pools around her on the tiled floor. I wait for her to move, for her to not really be dead, but the only movement is the growing scarlet puddle. I know I need to move, that I need to find Adriana, but I can't.

Nothing makes sense, but there was one thought that keeps me pinned to the ground.

I killed someone. I killed someone. I killed someone.

***

Question time!

Would you have left your parents behind as Desi did?
Is there something she should have done differently?
Do you think Adriana is still alive?

Chapter 5

(3) Savior

Adriana's sudden cry brings me back down to earth. I pick the tiny piece of glass out of my foot and rise, barely wincing from all of the adrenaline. Glancing down at Julie's body, I debate whether or not to take the knife out of her eye and take it with me. Afraid that she will magically wake up, like a *zombie* or something, I turn around and grab a new knife from the block. Disappointment fills me when I notice that my new knife was a little shorter.

Dread grows thick inside of me as I circle around to the wooden staircase, my eyes trailing up the steps, taking in the tiny bloody footprints. I creep cautiously up the stairs, only the balls of my feet

touching each step. One of my hands grips the railing as I tip-toe. The other holds on tight to the knife in case my trembling fingers fault me.

As I get closer to the top, I see the bathroom door that Adriana is holed up behind. The bathroom has two doors--one leading to the opening of the staircase and the other linking to Adriana's bedroom. Blocking my way to the door is Adriana's little brother, Landon.

Landon's back is to me, his height reaching a little over halfway up the door. His arms stretch out above him, his fingernails digging into the wood as he claws the barrier between him and his prey--his sister. Scratches cover the door, blood trailing each line. A chill sweeps up my spine as my face grows cold.

I hold the knife above my head as I take the last step on the staircase, ready to defend myself if Landon were to turn around and attack me. He is wearing his Buzz Lightyear pajamas, tugging at my heart. I bring my knife back down to my side, almost dropping it with how loose my grip became. Even if Landon were to turn around and try to eat me, I could not , *would not* , hurt this child.

Glancing up at the wall, I see a picture of Landon, kneeling on summer grass with a huge smile on his face, hugging his yellow Labrador, Chester. More pictures surrounding this one captures moments of Adriana and I's graduation ceremony, Julie and Rodger's wedding, a family photo of the four in matching sweaters and Chester's fake reindeer antlers tied around his head. If Rodger hadn't died of cancer, would he have been able to protect his family? I stand there and wonder how many families have been torn apart this morning.

I couldn't stab a child in the back, but I still have to get him away from the door. On pure impulse, I throw my knife as far as I can down the hallway, cringing as it clangs loudly against the far wall and falls to the floor.

Landon's head snaps to the side, revealing his profile, blood caked around his jaw and mouth. Maybe Julie's bite-marks came from Landon. I freeze, holding my breath, waiting for him to see me out of his peripherals. Letting out a snarl, Landon lurches

down the hallway, searching for the source of the noise.

The moment he clears the way, I quickly sneak into Adriana's bedroom and go to the connecting bathroom door. I try for the doorknob. Locked. Pressing the side of my face against the door, I whisper into the crack.

"Adriana," I say, keeping my eye on the doorway. "It's Desi. Open the door."

I hear a whimper, some scrambling on the floor and then the door opens. Adriana stands there, her dark chocolate hair tangled and falling out of the loose bun on the top of her head. Her sweatpants are covered with finger-strokes of blood like she had wiped her messy hands on them. Her eyes are wide and filled with terror--her chin quivering as she takes me in, looking even more scared than she was before.

I gaze down at myself, the ends of my long hair soaked in blood from falling in my kitchen. Blood is smeared all over my white shirt. My left arm and

hand are completely covered in crimson from Julie. I am drenched in blood in comparison to Adriana.

"Where's Landon?" she whispers, holding onto the door like she might slam it back shut. "Did you-"

"No," I answer, knowing what she was about to ask. "I didn't kill him. He's distracted." I eye Adriana. She looks like she is about to lose it, her whole body shaking, her eyes glittering with fear. Why don't I feel like that? What is wrong with me? "We have to get out of here. Now."

Adriana nods, the motion causing a tear to fall down her cheek. She steps out of the bathroom and walks towards her closet. "Just let me grab some things." Her trembling hands reach for a bag on the floor.

"Adriana, we don't have time," I argue with her, glancing back at the door. I spot a pair of tennis shoes by the wall and quickly step into them, not even bothering to ask Adriana if it is okay. "I don't know how long Landon is going to be distracted."

After I speak, Adriana and I both lock eyes, realizing that something is different. Silence fills the room, no

more sounds of scraping and footsteps coming from the hallway. I lift my hand and point towards the bathroom, placing one finger to my lips with my other hand.

Just as we make it through the door, Landon appears in the doorway to the bedroom, his mouth wide open, his teeth bared at me. I turn around, slamming the bathroom door shut on him. Landon pounds on the door. Adriana flinches with every sound, her eyes closing tightly.

Wrapping my arms around her, I speak into her ear. "My car is outside. In just a minute I'm going to open the door to the hallway and we are getting out of here. Do not look behind you. We have to go out the back door because one of *them* is trying to get in the front door."

I leave out that the *someone* is Tristan, knowing I might never get her out of the bathroom if she knew that bit of information. Hugging my friend as tight as I can, I pray that I won't lose her too. I can't lose anyone else I care about. Letting go of her, I reach for

the doorknob and turn it, yanking it open and shoving Adriana out through the door.

The noise from the door opening catches Landon's attention, just as I thought it would, and he rounds the corner from Adriana's bedroom as I sprint to the staircase. I take the first step down the stairs when Landon grabs a hold of my hair, yanking me backwards.

"Desi!" Adriana yells from the stairs, turning to come back to me.

"Keep going!" I yell as I slam my elbow back into Landon's temple, making him let go of my hair. I run down the stairs, taking three at a time and meet Adriana at the bottom, grabbing her hand and running for the back door.

"Where's my mom?" Adriana yells as I kept tugging her. I don't answer.

We hear a scream and a loud banging down the stairs. Turning my head around, I watch Landon tumble down the steps, standing up right when he gets to the bottom, not even phased by falling down a

flight of stairs. He spots us running and bolts towards us.

Adriana slams open the back door and I make sure to close it. One thing I've learned is that none of these changed people can open doors. We run around the side of the house. Adriana opens the hatch on the fence and pushes the large wooden gate open.

Then she freezes. We both hear the continuing screams that I heard earlier.

"Oh, God," Adriana says, her hand coming up to cover her mouth in horror.

"We can't stop now," I say persistently, pulling her arm to get her to come with me. She still is in her stupor when we get to my car.

Then the worst possible thing happens.

Adriana spots Tristan, who in turn spots us. I feel the heartbreak rolling off of Adriana. She takes a step away from the car, towards Tristan who is still on the porch, as if he is studying us-maybe he just can't smell us yet.

"Tristan..." Adriana says, her voice breaking as tears fall down her face, realizing she had lost yet another person in her life. Her hand reaches out in front of her as she takes a hesitant step towards her boyfriend. "It's me."

"Adriana," I warn. Panic is starting to rise inside of me again. My stomach clenches and my hairline sweats even more than it already is. "It's not Tristan anymore."

"It's okay, Tristan," Adriana coos, ignoring me. "I'm here now. Everything is going to be okay. We will fix you." She is too close. If she takes a few more steps, she will be at the bottom of the porch.

Through all of this, Tristan stays eerily still. The only part of him moving is his chest as he breathes slowly. I walk swiftly, hoping not to disturb his off-setting peace and grab Adriana's arms, pulling her backwards.

"Tristan is like the rest of them," I say urgently into her ear. "Get in the car before he attacks us."

"He's fine," Adriana argues, trying to pull away from me. "Look at him, he's not going to hurt us." I give her arms another tug and all hell breaks loose. "Let me go!" she screams, causing Tristan to scream in return.

Adriana's eyes widen in fear as Tristan leaps off of the porch and comes for us. I am ready, I knew it was coming, so I get away. Adriana, on the other hand, is quickly snatched by Tristan. She lets out an ear-piercing scream of pain as he digs his teeth into her neck.

"No!" I scream, turning around to face them.

Blood oozes down Adriana's neck, staining her shirt as Tristan's head shakes back and forth, digging his teeth farther and farther into her flesh. I pull on Adriana's arms, but Tristan's hold is too tight.

Then I hear something that shakes me to the core. Off in the distance, a chorus of shrieks rises. I turn my head in the direction they came from, down the end of the street. A pack of five or six people are running towards us. Even in the distance I can see the blood covering them.

"Don't just stand there!" someone yells from behind me.

I spin around to see a guy running in my direction, holding a baseball bat. For some reason I still can't move. The horrible gurgling sounds behind me and the screams of the people running towards us deafens my ears, but I couldn't look away from the person running towards me.

Finally.

Finally, someone came to help me.

After everything I had been through in the past hour, seeing someone alive and not crazy running towards me is the happiest sight in my life. As my savior crosses the street, his eyes are wide, taking my bloody body in.

"Why are you just standing here?" he screams at me, grabbing my hand. "Let's go!"

My feet are cemented into the ground and I pull on his hand. "Please, help her!" I cry desperately, pointing to Adriana. The guy glances behind me then back to me.

"I can't help her," he say, trying to pull me along.

"Well, I can't leave her here," I argue, trying to get my hand out of his grasp.

"You're going to have to! They're coming!" Without warning, he picks me up and flings me over his shoulder. He doesn't flinch as I slam my fists into his back. I scream for him to put me down as he runs with me to who knows where.

The further away we get, the braver I become and I finally lift my head to where Adriana is. She is silent as the group of things run in her direction, smelling the fresh blood. I slowly start to break as I see her head lying on the ground, detached from her body.

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A/n: Thank you for reading chapter 3!

Question time!

What qualities do you think someone must have to survive in the zombie apocalypse? As we have seen, some people are emotionally and physically equipped to handle this type of situation, while some

are not. That new character didn't last long, did she? What was her biggest downfall? Could Desi have done something different to save her?

F or those who have read Infection before, you know who her savior was.

Chapter 6

(4) Broken

I close my eyes as my body goes limp in my savior's arms. I can't take anymore. My body bounces on his shoulder as the sounds of growling, snarling, and flesh tearing fades away into the background.

I hear his footfalls on hollow wood and the click of a door opening and closing. The air changes as he steps inside wherever it is he took me. Thick hands reach up to grip my sides and I find myself sliding down his body, my feet coming to rest on the floor.

I open my eyes, keeping them pointed down, studying the lines on the wood floor under my shoes

—Adriana's shoes. My savior's feet are right in front of mine. He doesn't move away.

"Why didn't you save her?" I ask, my voice sounding so loud among the silence. I keep my eyes glued to the floor. "You had a bat, you could have done something to save her."

"There was nothing I could have done," he replies. His shifts his weight to one leg as he speaks. "You're lucky I was even able to get you out of there."

Slowly, I lift my head to look at him. A few splatters of blood line the fabric of his gray shirt. The trail continues up his neck, leaving a few specks across his jaw. It takes a while for my eyes to reach his face —he towers over me. His hair is dark and messy, contrasting with his light blue eyes, which are wide and scared, just as I'm sure mine are. From the looks of him he isn't much older than me, maybe three, four years.

"I'm grateful that you saved me," I say, suddenly finding it hard to speak. "But you made me leave her. I could have saved her. We could have saved her

together." My voice hitches, my breath halting in my chest.

"She was it," I continue. "She was all I had left. My mom, my dad, Adriana, even Mr. Johansen. Gone. They're all..." My legs give out underneath me and I fall to the floor, my knees knocking against the wood. "Gone."

The adrenaline fades fast. Tremors start in my hands as I cover my face, sending the rest of my body into a frenzy. My legs suddenly ache from the landing I had taken when jumping out of my window. The back of my head begins to burn from where I'm sure a chunk of my hair is missing. All of the pain I should have felt when my body was invincible, came to me.

The first tear falls down my face, opening the gates for an avalanche of emotions.

A loud, brutal sob escapes from me and I can't stop. I pull my hands away from my face and wrap my arms around my body trying to contain some of it. It is pointless. I continue to wail, my body rocking back and forth, my face wet with tears.

Visions swim through my mind, reminding me of all I have lost. Mom reading me bedtime stories, braiding my hair, and comforting me when I got my heart broken for the first time. Dad pushing me way too high in a swing, teaching me to play guitar, and threatening to get his shotgun and find that boy who broke my heart. Adriana punching Hannah Lee in the face for me in third grade, letting me comfort her when her Dad died of cancer, and punching that stupid boy in the face for breaking my heart—she was really good at punching people.

They were people that protected me, nurtured me. And I couldn't do anything to protect them, to save them. Why did my savior save someone as worthless as me?

Then he is next to me, his arm wrapping around my shoulders. Immediately, I jerk away, terror clenching my body. His touch makes me scream and I scuttle away from him into the wall behind me, holding out my hand to keep him away.

"Don't touch me!" I yell at him, spit flying from my mouth. "Don't touch me. Don't touch me."

He stumbles back, raising his arms out in front him. "I'm sorry. I just thought..."

I feel his eyes on me as I continue to sob, partially screaming. Then a new voice reaches my ears. "What the hell is going on?" the gruff voice asks.

I don't lift my head to see who it is, I don't care. I keep my face buried in my arms, quieting slightly to hear the two men.

"Who is this?" the voice asks, sounding closer.

"I don't know," my savior replies. "I saw her through the window. I couldn't just leave her there so I went out and—"

"You went out there?" the voice yells. I slowly lift my head, watching them argue.

"What was I supposed to do?"

"Stay inside, and stay safe—that's what!" The second man resembles the first except for the lines on his aging face and the round belly sticking out of the bottom of his shirt.

"Sorry, Dad, but in case you haven't noticed, you can't boss me around anymore. I'm not going to be a coward and shut myself inside while people are dying out there in the street!"

I sniffle and hiccup, both men slowly turning their heads to look at me. The older man takes one glance at me and his angry gaze melts, his eyes filling with pity and remorse. He takes a step towards me cautiously, as if his approach might send me into another wave of hysterics.

"Hey, sweetheart," he says, the corner of his lip turned up, trying to force a smile on his face. "I'm sorry about all that." He points over his shoulder like the conversation was still happening. "He's my boy, and I just get worried, that's all."

I don't reply. If I dare open my mouth, another sob will come out. When he figures that I am well enough, he closes the distance between us, crouching down in front of me.

"That's a lot of blood," he says, his face turning white. "Is—is any of it yours? Were you bitten?"

Bitten? What does that matter? I shake my head as I clench my jaw, trying to hold back another sob.

"Cody, let's get her cleaned up," the man says, turning his attention to his son behind him. He rattles off directives, but his words seems like a whisper as the world begins to skew.

My vision of him blurs and sways, as does my surroundings. The wood floor and the painted white walls melt together. I tilt my head to the side, trying to right myself in the titled room, but that only makes everything worse. Everything begins to spin, my stomach with it. A burning sensation creeps up my throat as my face goes cold.

"She's going to be sick," Cody says, quickly stepping around his father. He scoops me up, cradling me in his arms. I close my eyes trying to avoid watching anything moving, but I am still spinning behind my eyelids.

Then he is lowering me to the ground and pulling up a toilet seat. The smell of cleaning chemicals in the bathroom triggers the out-pour of vomit. Cody's fingers graze my neck as he pull my bloody hair

away from my face, trying to make me as comfortable as possible.

"Get it all out," Cody says, his voice echoing through the small bathroom. "You'll feel better."

I dry-heave a couple of times after, the retching like nails on a chalkboard to my ears. My hand fumble to flush the toilet. Cody lets my hair fall loose down my back, and reaches for the handle, flushing it for me.

"You alright?" he asks, handing me a few tissues.

I dab at my lips and wipe the edges of my eyes, sweeping away any remnants of tears. I sink back onto my knees, my gaze falling upon the blood covering my arm.

I jump to my feet and stumble to the sink, my legs weak with exhaustion. I turn the faucet on full blast and push my arm under the warming water. The blood won't simply wash away as I scrub with my fingertips. I dig in harder, rubbing my skin raw, the caked blood beginning to flake away.

"Are you alright?" Cody asks again.

My eyes connect with his in the mirror. "No, I'm not alright," I answer honestly. The amount of blood on my shirt made me want to vomit all over again. "I don't think I'll ever be alright."

"I know it's hard but—"

"No, you don't know." I spin around, facing him. My hands drip water all over the tiled floor, but I don't care. "You have no idea what I've been through in the past hour. You have *no idea!* "

"You're right," he answers, unfazed by my explosion. "I don't know. I've been here since I woke up this morning. I wish I could be out there helping people."

"No, you don't. The things I've seen..." I shudder. Snapping jaws and ear-splitting screams cross my mind. "Oh, God."

I turn back around, scrubbing at my arm again even though there were only a few dots of blood left. My eyes trail back to my bloody shirt.

"I have to get this off," I say, tugging at the collar of the shirt. Heat crawls up my face, my eyes prickling

with tears once again. Whose blood is it? Mom's? Julia's? Adriana's?

"Stay here," Cody says, rushing through the door frame. "I'll get you something to wear."

Then I am alone. My hands grip the edge of the marbled counter top as I try to stop my arms from shaking. I flinch as a vision of my mom crawling up the staircase infiltrated my mind. I clench my jaw, the image of Dad leaping out of the window after me replaying in my head. The knife sticking out of Julia's eye—Adriana's head lying on the ground, separated from her body. I shut my eyes, hoping to get rid of it all, but growls and screams still crawl over my skin.

I don't want to be alone anymore.

I burst out of the bathroom, my arms reaching out for the walls of the thin hallway as my knees wobble. "Cody?" I ask the empty space.

I get no answer. My heart hammers in my chest, nerves bubbling through my veins. The haunting chorus of growls and screams rise in symphony. They are everywhere, filling the air around me.

"Cody?" My voice is frantic, my eyes wide and searching. "Cody!"

I am half stumbling, half running down the hallway, when he appears through a doorway at the end of the hall, clutching clothes in his hands. When he sees the panicked look in my eyes, he drops the bundle to the floor and rushes towards me.

"Hey," he says, his eyes searching mine for answers. "You're really pale. Take it easy."

My body is drained. I can't hold myself up any longer, but Cody doesn't let me fall to the ground. I am back in his arms, the walls and ceiling blurring past me as he walks.

"I've got you," he says quietly as my eyelids fall heavy. I close them, feeling safe for the briefest moment. I don't put up a fight as I pass out, letting the growls and screams fade into the distance.

***

Please leave a comment with some feedback. I'm curious to see what you think of this chapter!

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Chapter 7

(5) Gone

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

The images and sounds replay over and over in my head as I dream.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

I startle awake with a shriek bursting from my lips. I glance around the unfamiliar room—the soft blue walls, the beige carpets, the white comforter covering my body. I sit straight up, pulling the blanket up to my chin as if it will be some sort of barrier to whatever torment is waiting for me.

A familiar face fills the open doorway, sending my hammering heart into a calm pitter-patter in my chest. I breathe a sigh of relief as Cody enters the room, his wide eyes searching.

"What is it?" Cody asks, scanning over my face. "Are you okay? I heard you scream."

"I'm alright," my voice cracks as I nod my head. "I just..." I trail off, not wanting to bring everything back into my mind. My tongue is like sandpaper in my mouth. "Do you have any water, by chance?"

I fling the comforter off of my body, the air feeling much cooler than it should. Cody's cheeks redden as he quickly looks away from me. I glance down at myself and realize why Cody is blushing, why I am cold. I am practically naked.

"Oh my God!" I yell, whipping the comforter back across my body. "How—who—did you?" I can't even form the right question, I am so flustered.

"I'm sorry," Cody said, the blush still filling his cheeks. "You were covered in blood and I thought you would feel better if you woke up with it gone."

He places his hand against his chest. "I didn't do it. I asked Selma to do it." Selma? Who is Selma?

It won't matter anyways after I flashed my body at him, but I admire his attempt. He turns around and walks back through the door, popping his head back through the doorway before leaving completely.

"Stay here," he says. "I'll bring you some water *and* some clothes." Then he is gone.

"Thank you," I reply, even though he can't hear me.

I stand from the bed, dragging the comforter off with me. Wrapping it around my shoulders like a cloak, I go to the window. I take a deep breath, knowing I shouldn't look out there because it might send me right back to where I was before I passed out, but I have to know.

I slip my fingers between the blinds and pull them apart, peeking out through the slit. I'm not sure what I expect—cars and houses on fire, herds of crazies screaming down the street, total carnage? The fact that the streets are eerily empty is even scarier. What

happened to the destruction and chaos I had witnessed?

There is a car across the street with its door open. Blood is smeared along its side and splattered on the windows. A few bodies lay in front lawns, only fragments of them left in the grass. My vision scans down the line of familiar houses until they land on Adriana's home.

My car still sits untouched in her driveway. My eyes trail just a bit farther and I jump away from the window with the gore seared into my brain. I close my eyes, hoping to unsee the remnants of Adriana's body scattered around her yard.

I bring my trembling fingers to my lips. It all must be a dream, a horrific nightmare. Soon, I will wake up back in my bed and everything will be back to normal. A scream lodges itself in my throat, trying to claw itself out. I swallow, but it doesn't help.

"You okay?" Cody's voice echoes in the room. I spin around to face him, spying a glass of water in one hand and clothes tucked under his arm.

"I'm fine," I croak, reaching for the glass. I tilt my head back, letting the cool water run down my throat. The glass is empty when I hand it back to Cody. "Thank you."

"No problem, seriously. Anything you need, you let me know." He holds out the clothes for me to take.

"Um, how long was I out?" I ask, clutching the clothes in my hand. "I looked out the window and everything is calm." Aside from dead bodies.

"You slept for close to twenty-four hours. Dad and I got worried, but we figured you were just sleeping off...everything."

"Where did they all go? There were so many of them."

"We don't know, but we aren't going out there to check."

It is then that I notice the ends of my hair. It hangs over my shoulders, reaching halfway down my torso. All of it is red, like someone had taken my hair and dipped it in my loved ones' blood. My face turns

clammy, the color draining from it, the scream I had been holding in bubbling to the surface.

"Shower?" Cody asks, distracting me. He eyes me, waiting for a confirmation.

I nod my head, biting the inside of my cheek. I swallow. But the knot will not go down.

~ ~ ~

I wish that I could have stayed in the shower longer as chills sweep up my body. A shower is just what I needed to clear my mind, but my wet hair and my shivering body make me think otherwise.

I dry my hair the best I can with the towel before opening the door to the hallway. A jumble of different voices reach my ears and I follow them down the hall to a staircase I hadn't seen when I first entered the house.

I stop at the head of the steps, my fingers gripping the wooden railing so hard that my knuckles turn white. My mother is crawling up towards me, her hands leaving bloody prints on the wood, her black eyes glaring into mine with nothing but hunger.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

But I can't. I open my mouth, trying to gulp down air that won't come.

My mother crawls closer and closer, her fingers reaching to claw my ankles. My chin trembles, the corner of my eyes stinging with tears. I blink, and she is gone. No blood is left behind, no snarls echoe in the air. She was never even there—just a figment of my imagination. And I will never see her again.

My knees wobble, but I shake my head clear and continue down the stairs. I refuse to look at the steps where I had seen my mother. Instead I look at the pictures that line the walls.

A family—a man, woman, and their son smile at me as I pass in front of them. The boy is Cody. I can tell from the light eyes and the dark hair that matches the woman's. He looks so much like her—his mother. His dad looks the exact same as he does now, except his eyes turn down more and look hopeless.

I reach the bottom of the stairs and follow the trail of voices into a large living room. Varied lengths of

brown leather couches span the room with a crimson rug in the middle of the wood floor. An unlit fireplace is embedded in the opposite wall. The ceiling is high and arched. In another life, I would be obsessed with the interior, but not when everything had gone to hell in a blink.

Several pairs of eyes lock onto me.

I spot Cody instantly as he rises from the longest couch. Everyone else stays seated and silent. I know their eyes are assessing me, judging me and the screams of mine I'm sure they heard yesterday.

Then Cody is at my side, his fingers grazing my elbow. He guides me to sit on the couch next to him, the leather cool against my back through the thin shirt I am wearing.

The eyes are still watching me.

"Everyone," Cody announces. "This is..." He looks to me, a small smile tugging at his lips. "Help me out here."

"Desi," I whisper, my voice not allowing me to speak with everyone watching.

"This is Desi," he amplifies for me.

"I'm Selma," says the woman seated on the couch adjacent to the one Cody and I are sitting on. Her black hair cuts off sharply at her jaw, bangs grazing her brow. Her accent is thick as she speaks. "I hope you are doing alright."

"I'm better," I lie, my voice still betraying me.

"This is my daughter, Aundrea," she says with a smile, her arm wrapping around the shoulders of a small girl. She looks so much like her mother with her black braided hair and doe eyes. She gives a little wave and glances away from me quickly.

"I'm Sheridan," says a petite blonde seated in a love seat across from me. She is beautiful with her aqua eyes and her rosy cheeks. Her nose curves delicately, her eyes twinkling as she looks at the man next to her, giving him a pat on the leg.

"Jason," the man says, nodding his head towards me. While everyone else looks at me with friendly gazes, his is cold. So cold. He doesn't want me here. I can tell that right away. But the question of if he will do

anything about that lingers in my brain. I take a mental note to stay away from him.

"And I'm Rich," says the man who helped calm me down yesterday. His hair is sandy brown and cut neatly on his head. He has a strong jaw and an angular nose. "This is my house. I opened my door for them and *you* can stay here as long as you need."

"Thank you," I say. "I don't know how long. I don't have anywhere to go..." My voice trails off as I think about my home and my mother who is probably still inside, snarling and growling at the window I had escaped through.

"And that's okay. We just need to wait this out, let the government get control of whatever it is that is going on, and then we can sort everything out."

"What *is* going on, anyways?"

Everyone swaps gazes.

"We've been getting a few news broadcasts here and there," Rich continues. "Other than that it's been static on the networks. They've summed it up to an

unknown infection. There's been debates on if it is natural or maybe even a terrorist attack."

"How far spread is it?" I ask.

"So far? Everywhere."

"Everywhere?" I can't contain the disbelief in my voice.

"Well, we don't know if it has spread across seas. Everyone cut off communication with us. But it's all over the U.S."

A chill sweeps up my spine. If it is everywhere then the odds of getting the country back to stability are very slim. I'm not sure there is going to *be* any 'waiting it out'.

"Terrorists," Jason says from the love seat. "A natural illness doesn't spread over night. This was planted in major cities across the country. I'd bet my life on it."

"Why would someone do that though?" I ask, curious.

"Why would someone crucify children? Why would someone drive planes into the tallest buildings in the

world? There are people in the world sick enough to unleash a plague upon our country."

"Jason's right," Rich agrees. "I fought overseas a few years ago until I lost my leg in a car bombing." He reaches down and pulls up the cuff of his pants revealing a rod of metal rising from his boot.

I'm not sure what to say. What do you say to a man who lost his leg? Finally I stutter out, "Th-thank you for your service."

Rich tosses his head back and laughs, making me sink back into the cushions of the couch. My face flushes. Is it such a foolish thing to say?

"What good did it do me?" he muses. "Us? Whether I had gone or not, the world still would have gone to shit in the blink of an eye."

"Dad," Cody warns his father.

"What? It's the truth. You, Desi, are a damn peach. Do you know how many people over the years have personally thanked me for putting myself on the line to protect this country? I can count them on one hand."

"I'm sorry," I say, my heart dropping for him. To lose a limb—I can't imagine.

"Don't be," Rich replies with a wink. "Don't apologize for other people's actions—only for yours."

"Got it," I say, giving him the smallest of smiles, which is the most I can conjure.

A bang sounds from the doorway. Everyone's head snaps towards the noise, listening. It seems we all hold our breath, waiting for the next clatter. I'm sure every mind is thinking the same way mine is. It is one of those *things.*

Tapping. Bumping. A growl. I whimper.

Cody is the one that stands up. I curl into his empty spot on the couch, moving myself as far away from the noise as I can.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

I shake my head, trying to clear away the images and the sounds. But they won't leave.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

I can see it in my head—hear it in my ears. It is all around me. In every breath, in every blink, in every heartbeat. I cover my ears as I close my eyes.

Make it stop. God, please make it stop.

"It's gone," Cody says. His voice is much farther away than it was a second ago. "It must have moved on when it didn't see or hear anything."

But they aren't gone in my head. They stay. I am gone, so far gone I'm not sure if I will come back.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

Blood. Teeth. Screams.

Hands are shaking me, trying to startle me out of my thoughts, out of the hole I've buried my self in. I crack open my eyes, seeing Cody bracing my shoulders, his lips moving, saying something—but what?

His voice slowly comes to me, like someone is turning up the volume knob.

"Desi?" he asks, his eyes wide and searching mine. "Desi, are you okay?"

Then I am back. The living room comes into focus behind his hard-breathing body.

"What's wrong? It's gone. There's nothing to be afraid of."

He is wrong. *So wrong.* There is the whole world to be afraid of.

Chapter 8

Chapter 6 (original version)

Quick and very important note: *From this point on, the chapters will be from my ORIGINAL version of Infection. Please note that the only major difference is instead of a house, the survivors are in Rich's cellar/ bunker. They've also learned to kill a zombie, it has to be to the brain. The story picks up after a night of sleep in the bunker. As you read this on, please remember that this draft was written in 2009 when I first started writing as a teen . Believe me, I know there are errors and I know how terrible it is, so if bad writing bothers you, I recommend waiting for the fully-rewritten version .*

Even though I was embarrassed at first to keep my old work up for readers to see, it was important to me to show readers how far I've come and how far anyone can come with practice. Happy reading!

#

I knew I was dreaming when I was riding in a car. I stepped out of my friends car, dismissed the dog that was barking with a wave of my hand, and walked to the front door of my house.

I took a step inside the door and was blinded with lights that suddenly flicked on above me. In the archway to the living room stood my mom and dad. I realized that this was a replay of what had happened the night before.

Mom had her arms crossed across her chest, still in her clothes that she wore to work, and I could tell that she was real pissed off. Next to her, and slightly behind her, stood Dad leaning against the archway. He had changed into his PJs and he looked more worried than mad.

I felt my body sway with drunkenness and my eyes squinted in the bright light.

"Lucy!" I imitated an accent. "I'm home!" I lifted my arms in the air and gave a big smile to my mom.

"Where have you been?" Mom said deeply, her eyebrows cocked up. "It's 2 o clock in the morning. Your curfew is midnight."

"Well, it's midnight somewhere," I said turning to walk to my bedroom.

"Desiree," Mom said more sternly. "We aren't done talking. I know you'e been drinking." She took a step closer to me. "I can smell it on you."

My stomach started to churn from the whiskey shots I'd had earlier that night. "Okay." I pointed at her. "Yeah. I need to lay down." I stumbled as I turned back around and my shoulder slammed into the wall. I belt of laughter erupted from my throat.

"Desi--" Mom started to yell.

"Lucy," Dad said loudly. "Stop it. Let her go to sleep and we will talk to her in the morning."

"No," I heard Mom start stepping towards me. She grabbed my arm. "We will handle this now."

"Don't be such a bitch," I whispered as my face went cold with sweat. Her jerking me around made me feel sicker.

"Lucy!" Dad yelled and Mom let in a quick gasp. "I said to stop it!" She let go of my arm.

"Screw you, Hoyt!" She shoved her hand in his chest and stomped off the kitchen.

I turned to look at Dad. His eyes were serious. He walked up to me and wrapped me up in a hug. Then I knew I was dreaming again because I heard a snarl start to rise in his throat. He leaned back and looked at me with bleeding black eyes and bit my face.

I woke up sweating. Cody snored lightly behind me. I slid myself out of his arms and stumbled around trying to find the door in the darkness. I finally found it and opened it slowly so that it didn't creak.

The hall lights blinded my eyes. I shut the door behind me and started to walk past the closed bedroom doors. I wondered what time it was.

I reached the grandfather clock on the corner of the hallway. 9:00 AM.

I turned the corner and saw that no one was in the dining room or the kitchen. I walked into the living room and looked down the hall to the cellar door.

It was wide open.

I froze where I stood and frantically looked around the room to make sure no infected were with me.

I struggled to gulp down air into my lungs and my hands shook at my sides. Sunlight was streaming in in a single ray. I saw the grass swaying in the wind and even saw little yellow dandelions. I wanted so much to pluck one, put it in my ear, and dance in the sun. If only I could go out there without being killed.

I heard screams and I turned around to run down the hall behind me. I sprinted as fast as I could to Cody in the bedroom.

I burst in the door.

"Cody!" I screamed. "The cellar door is open!" I tried to catch my breath from running. "I can't--didn't see

anyone but I just heard screams." I rested my hands on my knees and Cody jumped out of the bed.

We ran back down the hall.

When we reached the living room we saw Rich and Jason carrying in someone with blood all over them.

It was Sheridan.

"Oh my god.." I whispered. My hand went to my mouth in shock.

They laid Sheridan down in the middle of the floor while Cody ran to shut and lock the cellar door.

Jason and Rich were leaning over her. I heard Jason talking to Sheridan and I saw tears falling from his face. Tears filled my own eyes as my eyes scanned her body.

The bicep of her left arm had been completely torn out. Blood and bone was in it's place.

Her leg was broken, the bone emerging two inches out of the skin.

Blood was draining from numerous bite marks on her body.

Her face was the worst though.

It was completely lifeless and white. Her eyes were closed.

She was dead.

I couldn't look at her anymore. I switched my gaze to Jason.

Blood was all over his shirt, hands, and face. His cheeks were wet with tears and his hard muscular body shook with sobs, making him collapse.

He buried his head in her curly hair and wept.

I felt guilty for feeling weird about him before.

He just lost the love of his life.

I did not know that kind of pain, but it looked like he was dying on the inside.

I didn't even realize Cody was standing next to me again until I felt his hand grab mine.

"I'm so sorry, Jason," I heard Rich say from the floor.

Jason didn't reply. He just sobbed.

Suddenly his head shot up and stared at Sheridan. Then he looked at Rich.

"I just heard her breathe," he said, shocked. A smile spread across his face.

I couldn't see Rich's face from the angle I was at but I could tell Jason didn't like Rich's expression at that.

"What?" Jason said angrily. "Are you not happy that she's alive?" His face began to turn red.

"Jason..." Rich said calmly. Cody's grip on my hand tightened. "I saw Sheridan get bitten and so did you." He sighed. "You know what that means."

"No.." Jason said through his teeth. "No!" His voice scared me and made me flinch.

"She's infected." Rich said apologetically.

Jason stood up and swooped Sheridan up into his arms. He laid her on the couch and then turned back to face us.

"What's going on?" I heard Selma from behind me. I heard her gasp when she saw Sheridan and then

scurried back into the hall dragging Aundrea behind her.

We all turned our attention back to Jason. His voice was terrifying and the veins in his head and neck throbbed as he spoke.

"If any of you touch her," he said pulling a heavy-duty pocket knife out of his pocket.

"If any of you harm her, infected or not, I will kill you."

Chapter 9

Chapter 7 (original version)

"If you harm her, infected or not," Jason said through his teeth. "I will kill you."

Every one in the room was paralyzed in the spot they were standing. Cody's grip on my hand tightened.

Jason was standing in front of the couch baring the knife.

"Now Jason," Rich's deep southern accent filled the silent room. "Don't go and act all crazy on us. Times are crazy enough right now; we don't need to be fighting down here too." He held out both of his hands as he took a step forward.

Jason's eyes went crazy as he glanced at the rest of us, making sure that we weren't swarming him. Cody and I stood in our spots.

Rich took another step forward.

"Rich," Jason said his muscles clenched, almost tearing through his small t-shirt. "You better get back before I put this knife in you."

Rich's eyes widened in horror and he stepped back against the wall.

"She's gonna change Jason," Cody's voice shocked me. "From what Selma told us, the infection spreads through the body pretty quickly." His voice cut off and he sighed. "She'll probably change any minute now."

Jason's face turned a bright scarlet. The veins in his neck and head pulsed.

"And what are you going to do when it happens little Cody?" Jason said maniacally.

This was the side of Jason I had seen when I yelled at them for not letting the screaming person in.

Fear ran through my body.

"If I have to," Cody took a deep breath and he let go of my hand. "I will kill her."

A horrific grin spread across Jason's face.

"Then I'll just have to kill you now," he sneered. "Before you can even lay a hand on her."

He lunged at Cody who dodged the knife blade just in time.

As Jason overshot his stab, Cody caught him in the jaw with his fist. The knife in Jason's hand fell to the ground and as he scrambled to pick it back up a fierce blow came from Cody, smashing Jason's nose. The crack of his nose echoed through the room, making me cringe.

I struggled to stay where I was standing as I watched Cody fight. He seemed to be able to take care of himself though.

I heard a groan escape from Jason's disgusting mouth as he held his hand to his face, covering his bloody nose.

"You piece of shit!" Jason screamed jumping at Cody again.

Jason grabbed Cody by his shirt and pushed him across the room into the wall by the cellar door. Cody's head bounced off the wall with a deafening knock.

I stepped forward to run to help him when I heard a growl.

My eyes glanced around the room and fell upon the couch.

Sheridan wasn't laying down anymore.

She was sitting up glaring, growling at me. Bloody tears drained down her face as she stood up slowly off of the couch.

I tried to scream for Cody and for Rich, but my throat dried up and nothing but a whisper came out.

Sheridan pounced at me, knocking me to the ground. I tried to push her back with my legs as she tried to crawl on top of me.

Everything went black around me as I focused everything in on myself and Sheridan. This was life and death. I had to fight for my life.

I kicked Sheridan in the face, getting every one's attention. Even though Sheridan was infected and not herself anymore, the pain of me kicking her pissed her off. I saw the look in her eyes change and I quickly went to grab the knife that was laying on the ground beside me.

As she pounced at me with all of her strength I plunged the knife deep into her neck. I'm sure I hit the spinal cord because I felt and heard a snap. I watched Sheridan's eyes roll back into her head as the blood in her neck poured onto my hands. I shoved her off of me, disgusted with what I just had to do and ran towardsthe bathroom to get it all off of me, not even looking at the faces in the room.

I heard a scream come from Jason and then felt his big body fall on top of me, crushing me.

Big bursts of pain erupted from the back of my head and his fists pounded against my skull. I tried to

cover my hands over the back of my head but the kept getting pushed away by the big hands of Jason.

It stopped quickly when I heard the scream of pain behind me. The pressure off on my back was released and I rolled over to see what had happened.

Jason laid on the floor with a knife sticking out of his back.

Cody stood over Jason's body, his eyes glistening with tears.

"I-I never thought I would have to kill someone," Cody said. "But he would have killed you." His voice cracked.

I stood up from the ground as fast as I could and flung myself into his arms.

"Thank you," I whispered in his ear. "You saved my life again."

Chapter 10

Chapter 8 (original version)

I let go of Cody and started to feel lightheaded. I rubbed my head with my hand and sat down on the couch.

Then the pain began.

Horrible pain started to pulse in the back of my head where Jason had been hitting me. I could feel separate knots covering the back of my head.

I doubled over and clutched my hair at the roots trying to hold in a scream. No one came to check on me. One, there were two dead bodies laying on the floor; and two, I was completely silent.

I'm glad they left me alone. I had some time to myself to think. I realized I'm not just hurt.

I'm angry.

Just a couple of days ago I was living a normal life and I was happy. Now the devil has risen, grabbed Earth in his hands and shook it like a snow globe, changing everything. That pissed me off.

I'm angry that I had to lose people that I loved and cared about. I'm angry that a normal human had tried to kill me. I'm angry at myself too.

I'm tired of being so scared all the time. So much of my energy has been drained from looking over my shoulder every second that I get. It was time to change that. Yeah, this is a scary situation, but to live I need to suck it up and fight.

Slowly, I pulled my hands away from my head and sat up straight. I wiped my eyes of tears for the last time, I promised myself. The pain in my head weakened a little and my eyes skirted across the room analyzing the scene.

Sheridan laid a couple of feet away from me on her stomach with a pool of blood around her. Jason was closer to the hallway with a knife sticking out of his back. I saw Rich walk over and pull the knife out, wiping the blood off onto his shirt.

"We might be needin' this later," He said and tucked the knife into his belt.

Cody turned his head to look at me. His eyes were sad and I thought I almost heard him sigh. Without saying a word he walked into the hallway. I knew he was in the bathroom when I heard the shower turn on.

"I think he's real shook up about what happened," Rich said, plopping into the recliner. He reached up and wiped the sweat away from his forehead.

"And you aren't?" I asked, my voice raising an octav.e.

"Well," Rich shrugged his shoulders. "I've seen a lot of death." His voice turned glum. "I was in Iraq in 2003."

"Oh," I said understandingly. Our country has been fighting in Iraq for over seven years and a lot of our soldiers have died.

"Yes mam," Rich pointed to his right leg and pulled up the bottom of his pants showing me a prosthetic leg. "Lost this leg cause of a damn car bomb in the street." He let go of the hem of his jeans and let it fall to the floor. "So to answer your question; no, I didn't get all spooked at what happened. I still don't understand why Sheridan left."

"What happened exactly?" I leaned back onto the couch trying to ignore the bodies laying in the room.

"Well, I woke up and heard them two arguing." His eyes squinted while trying to remember. "I couldn't really hear what they were saying, but I know that it didn't turn out so well because the next thing I know, here comes Sheridan running around the corner and burstin' out that damn door." Irritation crept up in his southern accent. "Jason came barrelin' after her screamin' her name and I ran after him."

"Then the infected came.." My voice trailed off picturing the scene in my mind. I can only imagine the ache in Jason's heart when he saw Sheridan getting bitten over and over. My eyes darted to the two of them laying on the ground. I almost broke my

promise to myself when tears formed in the corner of my eyes. Then Cody walked in and I blinked them away, regaining my composure.

Cody's hair was still wet from the shower and I could smell the shampoo as he flicked his hair away from his face.

"How you feelin'?" Rich asked, looking at his son.

"Better," Cody said, then he looked down at the floor. "So what should we do with them?" He glanced from Jason to Sheridan and I could tell that he was replaying what happened in his mind.

"Well," Rich took a deep breath. "There's not much we can do, except put them in the room they were using."

"So they're just going to rot in there? While we just avoid that room?" Disgust overwhelmed my voice. This was different from my scared shaky voice I'd had yesterday and it took Rich by surprise. He raised his eyebrows.

"It's not like we can stay here much longer anyways," Rich said locking eyes with Cody. "We have to get food. We have to find some kind of civilization."

"We see if we can pick up any news," Cody said looking from Rich to me. "Then we go."

Chills ran through my body and goosebumps prickled on my skin. We wouldn't be safe anymore. We would have to fight our way to wherever we were going.

"I'll go let Selma know," Rich said firmly, standing out of his chair. "She's probably wondering what's going on anyways. She's probably still holed up in the closet." A chuckle escaped from his lips as he turned down the corner of the hall.

Cody watched his dad leave and stood idle for a second in silence.

"We can do this," He said turning to look at me. Taking a step towards me, he kneeled down in front of me so that he was at eye level. "It's now or never."

"Now," I said, taking his hands in mine. "It's now."

Chapter 11

Chapter 9 (original version)

I watched Cody flip through the channels on the TV, trying to find some kind of connection. Some stations showed different color lines across the screen, and some were blacked out but there were two that caught my attention.

The first one made me jump out of my seat. It was a picture, continuously frozen on the screen. An infected man was running towards the camera, only a few feet away. His ears were missing and his jaw hung at a grotesque angle. Blood ran from his eyes and his teeth were bared, ready to bite into something.. or someone. My heart slowed down

when I realized that it was on the TV and not in the cellar.

The second channel, seven words crossed the screen. May God have mercy on us all.

I'd had enough of sitting down. All I'd done was fidget in my seat. I stood up and put my hands on my hips.

"Well, I might not get to take a shower for a while so I'm going get on that," I said.

Cody turned around and looked at me for the first time in twenty minutes. "Okay, don't be too long though." He went back to flicking through channels. "I have a feeling something's going to come on."

I half-smiled at his psychic feeling and turned to walk to the bathroom. As I walked past the room Selma and Aundrea are staying in I heard Rich's southern twang trying to calm Selma down. I guess she wasn't taking leaving so well.

When I got to the bathroom door a figure jumped out from behind it making my blood pulse sky rocket.

"Whachu doin'?" Aundrea asked me, trying to hide her mischievous smile.

"Trying to get my breath back," I panted. "You really scared me there."

"Why is everyone so scared?" She put her hand on her hip. "Scared. Scared. Scared."

"You're not scared?" My voice had a little smile to it as I always have when I talk to kids.

"I'm not scared of anything!" I heard her foot stomp.

"Not even of the boogeyman,?" I wiggled my fingers out in front of her, making her giggle.

"He's not scary. I met him." She pointed her thumb to herself.

"She's honestly not scared of a single thing," Selma's voice sounded from behind me. I turned around and saw her walking towards the door. Her eyes were red from crying. "She's the bravest person I know." Her gaze turned to her daughter who was now standing next to her. "You weren't even scared when we were

running from our home." I heard her voice get sad, as I knew home reminded her of her husband.

"I miss Daddy," Aundrea said looking down at her feet. "But I'm still not scared."

"Come on," Selma said placing her hand against her daughter's back. "Let's go pack up the few things we've brought." Aundrea gave me a small wave goodbye and they vanished into their room.

I took a thorough but quick shower. I had to be clean, but I needed to hurry.

I dried off my body and pulled on a pair of basketball shorts and blue T-Shirt I found in the cabinet. Unfortunately, I had to brush my hair with my fingers, and I ended up giving up and just pulled my messy blonde hair into a ponytail at the top of my head.

When I walked into the living room the bodies were gone and replaced by towels that lay where the pools of blood were. Rich sat in the recliner with his legs propped up and Cody sat on the couch. I saw him pat the spot next to him, motioning for me to sit. I

plopped down on the couch and folded my legs under me, letting them touch his leg.

"So what's the plan?" I asked aloud, wondering if one was figured yet.

"Three blocks away there's a Walmart," Rich said fixing his eyes on me. "We can get everything we might need there. Food, clothes, medicine, maybe even camping gear."

"That's the first option," Cody said. He placed his hand on my leg spreading warmth through my veins. "We could get there and it be mobbed with infected; if so, then we go into houses."

"Are we just gonna run out the front door?" I was sounding skeptical. "What if they are everywhere?"

"My thought is that they've spread out," Rich said matter of factually. "The infection has most likely spread through to other states, maybe even the country or the world. We don't know for sure. But we do know one thing." He held up his pointer finger. "They need to eat, and they don't eat themselves, only people. This town is probably either all infected,

dead, or hiding like us so they have to look elsewhere."

This made perfect sense and I realized Rich was a smart man. I felt bad for thinking that he might not have been, but I wouldn't have guessed so by his appearance. He still wore the bloody shirt with his scuffed up jeans he'd been wearing the day before.

"How do you think this all started?" I asked him.

"I have a theory of animal testing gone wrong," Rich replied, and then motioned with his hand to Cody. "But Cody thinks it might have been some kind of contamination in food or water. Either way sounds like it could be--"

His voice was cut off a buzz of static from the TV. We all three turned to look at the screen.

The buzzing stopped and a woman appeared standing in front of a field of tents. Medical tents, tarps, and camping tents spread across a mass field. In the distance I could see a tall fence with barbed wire at the top.

"This is Vivian Hoff speaking from a safe camp outside of Springfeild," the woman said. Her red hair blew in the wind. I could see army men and civilians walking behind her. "If there is anyone out there that can somehow make it here, we can take you in." She turned over her shoulder and pointed to the camp behind her. "We have blocked out infected and have a secure site for people in need."

All of our eyes widened in amazement. Rich mumbled "Well by god," and Cody's hand gripped my leg.

"We also have scientists and doctors who are working on a cure that has almost broken through," Vivian Hoff said with excitement. "There is a type of blood immune and toxic to the infection. B Positive blood can reverse the effect of the illness and hopefully bring our country back into sanity. Even though the rest of the world has quarantined us, we still thank you for the daily supplies airlifted to us."

"A cure?" Rich whispered, his voice in awe. "What type blood do you have Desi?"

"I—I don't know," I said sounding ridiculous.

"What do you mean you don't know?" Rich almost sounded angry.

"I mean I don't know," I defended myself. "I've never needed to know it."

Rich raised his voice. "You're always supposed to know your--"

"Dad!" Cody yelled, cutting him off. "Shut up!"

Rich fell silent and looked back the TV. Vivian started speaking again.

"Unfortunately, we only have room for fifty more people. I'm sorry" She said, her eyes looking sad. "We hope to see you."

The TV went black.

"Well," Rich stood up. "What are we waiting for?" He turned to walk down the hall to get Selma and Aundrea.

Cody turned to look at me and grabbed my hand.

"Listen," he said and his gray eyes pierced into mine. "I know that we just met and don't really know each other but I won't let you die. As silly as this may

sound in a time like this, I like you and I would be hurt if anything happened to you."

My heart thudded in my chest. "Thank you," I said feeling the same way about him. "I won't let you die either."

"Don't worry about me," He said giving me a weak smile. "Worry about keeping yourself alive."

Then he rested his hand on my cheek and kissed me.

Chapter 12

Chapter 10 (original version)

All of us stood at the cellar door in silence.

Rich had his knife in his hand looking at the door. He stuck his other hand in his back pocket and pulled out a picture, kissing it before putting it back.

Selma stood weaponless with a small duffel bag, packed with her and her daughter's things. Her other hand held Aundrea's. I glanced down at her and gave her a little smile after seeing the fork in her hand. Not scared of anything.

Cody was holding a baseball bat that I'm guessing he had brought down when they first came down here.

He swung it back and forth between his hands anxiously.

I was holding a wooden chair leg. Cody had broken it off from a chair in the kitchen and it had a nail sticking out the end of it.

"Are we all ready?" Rich mumbled, his eyes picking through the group of us.

"Yes," Cody whispered. He turned his head to look at me and we locked eyes. We shared a silent conversation between us, maybe even a goodbye. With his open hand he reached down and laced his fingers with mine sending sparks up my arm. He lifted my hand to his lips and kissed it gently; never taking his eyes away from mine.

The door flung open breaking our gaze apart. The bright light from outside blinded us all for an instant before Rich barreled out into the sun with the rest of us on his tail.

I almost stopped to look at all of the destruction but then I felt a tug from Cody's hand that kept me going. I searched for where Rich was leading us and saw

that it was the street. Bodies laid strewn across it and cars were twisted metal. I stopped mid-run causing Cody's hand to slip out of mine.

"Wait," I said firmly but quietly. Everyone stopped and turned their heads to look at me. I could tell they were scared to stop. "We can't just go walking down the street." I waved my hand in front of me. "That's the most obvious way to be seen."

"She's right," Cody said to his dad. "We go through backyards." He didn't wait for Rich to agree. Instead, he grabbed my hand and led us towards the backyard of the house next door.

All of the backyards were open with no fences so we jogged through them with ease. The grass felt good on my bare feet but I was sure to look for rocks or broken glass with every step that I took.

We didn't see as many bodies in the yards than we did in the streets and maybe that was a good sign because we didn't see any infected.

Cody held my hand the whole time we ran, not letting me get behind or out of his site. We didn't

speak and I could hear his pants of air as we made our way through every yard.

"Well," I heard Rich's voice ahead of us. "Look's like we got lucky--"

Click, click. Rich's voice was cut off by the sound. I instantly classified a shotgun being cocked as the scariest sound I've ever heard.

"Where do you think yall are goin?" I heard a deep scratchy voice. My heart almost stopped in my chest and I gulped down breaths of air trying to revive it. Selma dropped down and shielded Aundrea while Rich, Cody I turned towards the house.

A man with wild black hair aimed a shotgun at us. He was standing in the doorway to his kitchen with one foot still inside. He cocked his eyebrow.

"I said, where do you think yall are goin'?" He asked us a little more sternly.

"We're headed to the Walmart up the street," Rich answered raising his hands in the air as a surrender. "Gotta get some supplies." He shrugged his shoulders as if saying, 'isn't it obvious?'

The man aimed his eyes and gun at me. "Yall infected?"

"Does it look like we are?" I said with a stab of annoyance. Cody turned to look at me with an expression of warning on his face.

"Well how am I supposed to know?" The man asked. A sly smile spread across his face. "Maybe you should take off your clothes so we can see if you got any bites on you."

I saw Cody tense next to me. His voice was cold as he spoke. "You better not--"

"Durbin," Rich said to the man. "You know that's not necessary."

"Who's got the gun Rich?" The man named Durbin retorted back. These two obviously knew each other. Durbin continued to aim at me. Stubble grazed along his jawline. He winked at me and said, "Come on sweet thing, we're all waiting on you." He pointed the shotgun at me again.

Selma covered Aundrea's eyes and looked away at the other houses. Cody stepped in front of me, blocking Durbin's sight.

Durbin let out a roar of drunken laughter. "Calm down boy!" He lowered the gun to his side. "I was only joking." But something in his eyes told me that he wasn't kidding around.

Cody still remained where he was not even shifting his weight. I could see his back and shoulders tense through his shirt.

"Wouldn't mind seeing her with her clothes off though," Durbin said reaching his arm into the kitchen. He pulled a flask from the counter and brought to his mouth taking a swig. "Good to know this world still has some beauty in it." He winked at me again and bit back the bitter taste of the alcohol. "Well, I guess I'll be coming with yall. I aint got nothing but beer in the fridge and I'm feeling like an adventure." Durbin swung his shotgun over his shoulder and stepped out of his house not even shutting the door behind him.

"Hell no," Cody said holding his bat out to block Durbin's way. "You're not going anywhere with us."

Durbin faced Cody and bowed his shoulders. "You better watch it boy," He said with intimidation. "Or I'll snatch her up like its Christmas morning." I could smell the alcohol on his breath he was so close.

"Go ahead and try," Cody said back just as intimidating. "You'll regret it."

I glanced over at Rich who was just watching silently, his eyes filled with worry.

"Can we just get out of here?!" Selma yelped looking over her shoulder. "It's not safe here."

"Let's go gang," Durbin said taking the lead, his shotgun still thrown over his shoulder. Rich followed behind him with his knife out; ready to attack if necessary.

Cody turned around and kissed my forehead before grabbing my hand and following the train.

"Why is Rich letting him stay with us?" I whispered into Cody's ear while we walked.

Cody angled his head down and said quietly, "He has a gun and we need one. Rich always thinks practically."

"It seemed like they know each other," I watched Durbin to make sure he didn't hear us.

"Long story," Cody said through his teeth. But I could tell something about Durbin angered him. "I'll tell you later." He gave my hand a squeeze and I saw his eyes widen when he looked ahead.

We were standing in the Walmart parking lot. I gasped at the chaos of it all. Shopping carts lay turned over across the lot, dumping bags of food and toilet paper onto the pavement. Mutilated bodies were hanging out of car doors. My eyes paused by the front doors when I saw them.

We all spotted the infected at the same time and dashed to hide behind cars. A severed hand lay at my feet and Cody put his hand over my mouth to stop the scream that threatened to come out. Durbin peaked his head up above the hood of the Honda he was perched behind.

"There's three of them," Durbin said plopping back down to the ground, his shotgun clutched in his hands. He went to cock it when Rich stopped him.

"If there's more near by," Rich whispered to him. "The bangs will surely attract them." Rich turned to look at Cody.

"Look's like it's time for batting practice," Rich smiled.

Cody stood up with his bat and started to sneak up to the doors. He stopped behind a big black truck, pressing his back against the driver's side door. Taking a deep breath, he locked eyes with me before he turned to face the infected with his bat raised .

Chapter 13

Chapter 11 (original version)

The world seemed to flow in slow motion as I watched Cody approach the infected. He was silent and swift with each step he took. I could tell when one of the infected women smelled him when her head popped up alertly. Before she could let out a scream Cody swung his bat like he was hitting a home run. Blood flowed out of her dented head as she fell to the ground.

Hearing the commotion, a shorter woman with a missing arm ran towards him. Cody brought the bat down on her knee making her let out an inhumane scream. A deafening crack echoed through the

parking lot when Cody hit her decaying neck so hard that her head flew off.

Cody didn't see the infected man running at him from behind.

“Cody!” I screamed and stood up from my hiding spot, sprinting towards him. Bits of glass and rock sliced into my bare feet, but I shrugged off the pain and kept running.

My scream had given Cody enough time to turn around and put his bat in front of him as the man tackled him to the ground. He had his bat up across the man's neck, as he snapped his teeth.

I didn't even hesitate as I brought my chair leg down onto the man's head. The nail drove deep into his head and he instantly died. A stream of blood had sprayed onto my face and I wiped it away with a disgusted look on my face. Cody flung the man's limp body off of him and looked up at me.

“You are so stupid,” He said shaking his head. Standing up he engulfed me in his arms.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and buried my face in his shoulder as he lifted me off the ground. We didn't speak or cry. Just listening to each other breathing was slowing our heart rate.

I heard a throat being cleared behind us and Cody put me back down.

“If you two lovebirds are done we can check it out inside,” Durbin said looking annoyed. He grabbed his flask from his pocket and took a long drink.

“You know,” I said with a sudden jolt of courage. “Maybe you shouldn't be drinking.”

Durbin took a step closer to me, breathing his alcohol in my face. I stood my ground. “Maybe you shouldn't run your mouth to people that you have no idea what they're capable of.” Cody moved towards Durbin but I stopped him.

“I'm not scared of you,” I said strongly, taking another step towards him. Our faces were only a few inches apart. I could tell he used to be a good-looking man until he let the alcohol get the best of him. “I think you're a pathetic excuse of a man. Does every

other woman think so? Is that why you have to drink your life away?”

A smile spread across his face and his gaze fell on Cody. “His mama didn't seem to think so,” He chuckled stepping around me and walking to the doors. Selma, Aundrea and Rich followed; Rich stopping to pat his son on the back.

I turned to look at Cody. “Your mother?”

Cody's face fell sad and he looked down at his shoes. “Yeah,” He said quietly. “Part of the long story.” He looked back up at me. “Let's just go.”

I followed Cody inside. Half of the lights inside the Walmart were on and the others were off. I saw patches of blood smeared across the floor, but no dead bodies. Farther away I could see the shopping aisles, with different products laying scattered across the floor.

“We go as a group,” Rich said to us all. “First, we go get backpacks big enough to hold food and other items we'll need. Then we will get food, water, medicine, and clothes.”

Durbin nodded his head silently and led us to the outdoor section of the door. We grabbed a heavy duty camping backpack for all for us, except Aundrea, which each had a sleeping bag rolled up at the top zipper. Selma found a water purification kit and Rich grabbed some lighters before we went to the food.

We only grabbed things that were ready to eat. Granola bars, cans of veggies, tuna, and chicken with pop-open lids, and numerous amounts of bottled water. We stopped an sat in the dairy section and made ourselves sandwiches, taking a break.

Then we made our way over to the pharmacy grabbing pain medication, burn ointment, bandages, and other medicines that I saw Cody throwing into our backpacks.

“Sit down and give me your feet,” Cody said, surprising me. I had completely forgotten about my cut up feet and looked down at them. There was blood underneath them, staining the tile floor. I turned my head behind me and saw that I'd been leaving bloody footprints throughout the store.

We both sat down on the floor and I put my feet in his lap.

“Why did you run after me like that?” Cody asked with concern in his eyes. “Look at what you did to your feet.” I angled my head to the side and saw that there were pieces of glass and rock still sticking out of my feet, jarring into my flesh.

“I told you I wasn't going to let you die,” I looked into his gray eyes. They were already looking ino mine.

“And I told you not to worry about me,” Cody said firmly. “You could have gotten yourself killed.”

“Well, I didn't. No, thank you Desi?” I rolled my head back to look at the ceiling.

I heard a small laugh from Cody. “Thank you Desi,” He said sweetly. “But don't do it again.”

I smiled at his protectiveness over me and let him get all of the glass out of my foot. Out of the corner of my eyes I saw Durbin popping a couple of pills into his mouth, obviously trying to rev up his high. Cody lathered my feet up with antiseptics and wrapped gauze around each foot.

I stood up and laughed. “It's like I have padding on my feet!” I jumped a couple of times and then winced as pain shot up through my feet.

“Calm down killer,” Cody said wrapping his arms around me. “Let's get you some shoes.”

We were escorted to the shoes by Durbin and his shotgun. I could feel the tension rolling off of Cody as he kept glancing over his shoulder at Durbin.

“Aint nothin' to see here boy,” Durbin said after Cody's third glance.

I picked out a pair of comfortable tennis shoes, which were snug around my feet because of the bandages, but I made do.

I was happy when we got to the clothes department, ready to be rid of my dirty bloody shirt. I didn't even bother going to get panties when I already hadn't been wearing any the past two days. I picked up two small tank tops, wanting to leave room in my backpack, and two pairs of comfy shorts.

“No peeking,” I said smiling at Cody. I turned around and lifted my shirt up over my head. I could feel

Cody's eyes piercing into my bare back. I glanced over my shoulder and caught him. I giggled. “I said no peeking!”

“Sorry,” Cody said flushing with color. “I couldn't help it this time.” But courteously he turned around and faced the other way.

I pulled one of the tank tops over my head and pulled off the shorts I'd been wearing, replacing them with some new ones.

“I knew you'd look good with no clothes on,” I heard Durbin's scratchy voice say. My face went white when I realized he'd been watching me the whole time.

“You son of a bitch!” Cody yelled from the other side of me. I felt a rush of air as he ran past me, slamming his fist into Durbin's face. Durbin stumbled back but then aimed his gun at Cody.

“Not so tough now are you boy?” Durbin smiled with blood running out of the side of his mouth.

Cody stood still, his face fuming with anger. They stood at a standstill.

I walked in between them and held my hands out in front of me.

“Sorry,” I said telling my voice not to shake. “You won't be killing anyone today.”

“You're lucky your girls got some balls,” Durbin spat out. “Or else I'd have splattered your brain all over that mirror behind you.” Throwing his shotgun over his shoulder, he turned away laughing.

Cody's fists clenched tight at his sides and I put my hand around one trying to calm him down.

“I swear I'll kill him,” Cody said through his teeth.

Chapter 14

Chapter 12 (original version)

Cody's jaw twitched as he clenched his teeth together, trying to control himself.

“Don't,” I whispered calmly, even though I wish he *would* kill him. “It's not worth it.” I didn't want that on Cody's conscience.

“You don't understand,” Cody said fiercly, turning to face me. His eyes locked with mine. “I fucking hate him.”

“Does this have to do with your mother?” I asked carefully, not wanting to push his buttons.

He sighed. “Yes, and you too Desi,” He unclenched his fist and laced his fingers with mine. My heart skipped at beat as he said my name, but I focused myself on finding out about his mom.

“What happened with her?” I stepped closer to him, letting him know that I was here for him.

Cody hesitated then said, “She left my dad for that scumbag.” Anger struck across his features. “While Rich was in Iraq she had Durbin over to the house almost every night.” He let go of one of my hands and brought it to his forehead like he had a headache. “I could hear them having sex, knowing that my dad was out there risking his life everyday.”

I accidentally let out a gasp and Cody took his hand away from his face, looking at me again. “Oh, that's not even the worst part.” He rolled his eyes. “When Rich came back from Iraq wounded, my mom tried to act like there was nothing going on. She was at the hospital everyday and went with him to his rehabilitation classes. I couldn't stand all of the lies and deceit so I spent time away. When my dad finally

asked me what was wrong, I couldn't help it, I had to tell him."

"Oh no," I whispered bringing my hand to his cheek. Cody reached up and held onto it.

"Even after she left him he still carried her picture with him in his back pocket," He half-smiled at the thought. "It's probably still in there right now. He loved her unconditionally."

My eyes teared up as I remembered Rich pulling the picture out of his pocket and kissing it in the cellar. I blinked them away before Cody could see and stepped in close to him, wrapping my arms around his back. I felt his arms wrap around me and he laid his head against the top of mine, taking deep breaths.

"Where is she now?" I asked with my ear against his chest.

"She died a couple of years ago from cancer," Cody said trying to will the emotion out of his voice. "Rich was devastated, but Durbin didn't even shed a tear at her funeral." My heart filled with rage and I understood Cody's hatred towards the despicable

man. “Even though she ruined our family. I still loved her, and miss her.” Cody's arms wound tighter around me and I felt a tear drip onto my head.

I let go and looked up at his glossy eyes, wiping the tear track away with my thumb. “Thanks,” He managed a smile at me.

“Do you think they'll let us walk to the bathrooms alone?” I asked hopefully. “I really have to go, but I don't want to have to even look at Durbin.”

“We don't need to ask them,” Cody answered as he started walking. “I think we can handle it.”

Cody picked up his bat and my chair leg from the floor, handing it to me. “Just in case,” He said.

As we walked I could tell Cody was deciding whether or not to say something to me. He kept opening his mouth to speak but then snapped it shut with a shake of his head.

“Will you just say it already?” I asked, putting my empty hand on my hip.

Cody looked startled. “Um, yeah.” He still hesitated, but then spoke again. “What were your parents like?”

My heart dropped down to my stomach, and I bit back the urge to cry. “My parents..” I started and then stopped, not wanting my voice to crack. I swallowed. “My parents were polar opposites.” I looked down at the floor as we walked, focusing on each individual tile, not wanting to break my promise to myself. “Mom was the stern one. Maybe a little too stern. If her rules weren't followed then that meant that I was the worst child on the planet and had some kind of problem. She took me to shrinks a lot, trying to see if I had any kind of disorder.” I huffed out a gust of air and smiled up at Cody. “And she thought I was the crazy one.”

Cody smiled back at me. “And your dad?”

I looked up at the ceiling as if I was speaking directly to my dad, whom I wished was in Heaven. “My dad was amazing.” I turned my head back to look at Cody. “After my mom would ground me he would always sneak me in my cell phone, or let me go out, telling

my mom that I was out running an errand for him. He's the one that I really miss."

Cody wrapped his arm around me as we reached the bathrooms. He opened the Ladies' Room door with his bat at the ready.

"All clear," He said back to me. "I'll be waiting outside the door."

The bathroom was the most normal looking thing I'd seen since we were in the cellar. There was no blood, no debris, nothing. It seemed like I had stepped out of the world of chaos and back into reality.

"Well, this is nice," I said to myself, stepping into the stall.

When I was done I gave my hands a good washing and scrubbed the blood splatters of my arm and face. There, I thought, much better. I re-did my ponytail and straightened my clothes before stepping back out into the Walmart.

At first, my heart raced as I looked around for Cody. Then I saw him rounding the corner with a hungry

look in his eyes. I was scared until his lips crashed into mine.

His hands held my face as my arms wrapped around him, squeezing at his back. Cody let go of my face, wrapped his hands around my waist, and pulled me closer to him. Our breaths turned ragged as he pinned me against the wall, pressing his body against me. I could feel his muscles through his shirt and his body heat radiated onto me. He broke away but kept his face only an inch away from mine.

“I've been waiting to do that since the last time,” Cody said hoarsely. “I just had to work up the courage.” He kissed me again.

“Why. Would. You. Have Been. Scared?” I managed to say between each kiss.

“Do you not realize how beautiful you are?” Cody rested his forehead against mine. “When I saw you running that first time, I had to remind myself about the infection. I could have sworn there was an aura around you, drawing my attention to you because I couldn't look away. I knew I had to save you.”

I could feel my blood pulse faster and faster with every word that he spoke.

“And when I saw you,” I whispered back. “I felt as if God himself had made you open that door. That he had bigger plans for me. As if he had named you as my guardian angel and to take me away from the danger. I can never thank you enough.” I tilted my head up and kissed him slowly.

“Where is that boy!?” We heard Durbin yell in the distance, causing Cody and I to break apart.

“Durbin,” Rich spoke more quietly. “Calm down, I'm sure he's--”

A loud smack and a moan caused Cody and I to sprint back towards the clothes department. We stumbled upon the group. Selma was on her knees holding Aundrea away and covering her ears. Rich was holding his face with blood seeping through his fingers. Durbin took a drink from his flask and popped a pill into his mouth. A burp escaped through his lips as he eyed Cody.

“Speak of the devil!” Durbin slurred. “We were just talking about you.”

“It doesn't look like you were just talking,” Cody snarled back. “Are you okay dad?” He looked at Rich.

“I'm fine,” Rich mumbled through his hands. “Been through worse.” I triumphed at Rich's toughness.

“You and I got a score to settle,” Durbin said, interrupting Cody's exchange with his father.

“Let's do this like real men then,” Cody said eying Durbin's shotgun. “Drop the gun.”

Durbin set it on the ground willingly and balled up his fists, ready for a fight. I touched Cody's shoulder to stop him but he shrugged me off and walked towards Durbin. His first swing knocked Durbin right in the jaw causing him to fall backwards. Cody jumped on top of him raising his fist. He brought it down hard on his face again making Durbin spit it out blood.

Durbin wedged his legs under Cody and kicked him off of him making Cody slam onto his back. Before he could get up, Durbin was straddling him with his

hands around Cody's neck. When Cody's face started to change color from lack of air I glanced at Rich who looked back at me between his fingers.

“You coward!” I said to him, running forward. I ran to the shotgun laying on the floor, picked it up, and pressed the tip of the barrel against Durbin's head.

“Not so tough now are you?” I said bitterly, shoving the gun against his head.Durbin lifted his hands in the air. Cody coughed and tried to catch his breath.

“You aint gonna shoot me,” Durbin laughed.

I cocked the gun, making Durbin's eyes widen in terror.

“Yeah,” I narrowed my eyes at him. “That's what I thought.”

Chapter 15

Chapter 13 (original version)

I still had the barrel of the shotgun aimed between Durbin's eyebrows. I spared a look at Rich who had uncovered his face, showing off a deep gash on his left cheekbone. Blood slowly trickled out now over blood that had dried. He looked to me appreciatively, but instead of acknowledging him I looked away slightly annoyed at him at the moment.

My eyes fell upon Cody who was still trapped under Durbin. I pleaded to him with my eyes, wondering what is it I should do. Should I kill Durbin, or should I let him live? Cody shook his head, which didn't answer my question. No, I shouldn't kill him, or no I shouldn't let him live? I argued with myself in my

head, turning my head side to side as I thought of the repercussions.

I switched my gaze to Durbin who was frozen where he kneeled. There was complete silence from everyone when we locked eyes. I don't think I even heard them breathing. My nerves started to boil inside of me as I started to pull the trigger. When I saw Durbin close his eyes and whisper something under his breath, I stopped. I took a long look at him and then brought the butt of the gun down against his temple, knocking him out.

Durbin's body went limp like a noodle and fell to Cody's side. Cody kicked off Durbin's legs with disgust and stood up, grabbing the gun from me. He held it out to Rich who stumbled over to take it gladly.

Cody turned his attention back to me. “Why didn't you do it?” He asked; his gray eyes piercing into mine.

“He said something when he thought he was going to die,” I said looking down at sleeping Durbin. “I want to know what it was.”

I could tell Cody wasn't sure how to react, but Rich stepped in saving him. He had torn a shirt off of the rack and held it to his bleeding cheek.

“Who's up for some tuna salad sandwiches?” Rich said. Cody chuckled at his dad's optimism and volunteered to go get the ingredients. Rich handed him the shotgun and Cody set off on his mission.

I glanced over to where Selma and Aundrea had been to see that they had gotten out their sleeping bags and laid them across the floor. Aundrea looked up at me.

“Thanks for not shooting that man,” Aundrea said. “I know he cusses a lot but he found me some chocolate.” I watched as she pulled a Snickers out of her pocket. “Mmm, I loooove Snickers.”

Selma snatched the candy out of Aundrea's hand. “Not before bedtime,” She said authoritatively. Good to know that she still expected her daughter to mind her. I heard Aundrea give out a whine as she started to argue with her mother.

I turned to look at Rich who was smirking at me.

“What?” I asked, furrowing my eyebrows.

“Look at you,” Rich said. “Growin' up and takin' care of business.” He reached over and gave me a slap on the back. Even though I was irritated with him for acting cowardly, I still gave him a smile.

We all sat in silence, except for Aundrea who kept talking about her two dogs she had, “Well used to have,” She had to keep correcting herself.

When Cody came back he had an armful of bread, tuna, and mayo with the other arm carrying the shotgun. He plopped it down by Rich and came to sit next to me, wrapping his arm around my waist. I leaned my head against his shoulder and watched as Rich used a hanger to stir the tuna and mayo together.

With a full belly and a quenched thirst I rolled my sleeping bag out next to Cody's. Rich had declared that he would keep watch and leaned back against a pillar with the shotgun in his hands.

I laid down on top of my sleeping bag and Cody laid next to me, holding out his arms for me. I scooted

close to him and laid my head on his chest, feeling his arm wrap around my waist. I could hear his heartbeat faster when I rested my hand on his stomach.

I looked up at him. “You think you can protect me one more day, guardian angel?” I asked. My lips curved up into a smile.

“I could protect you forever if you'd let me.” He gave me a kiss and I laid my head back down on his chest, closing my eyes.

My body seemed to relax as his heart beat a constant rhythm. I smiled. I'd let you protect me forever, I thought to myself, and I would die to protect you. Only knowing Cody for this long and feeling this made the butterflies rise in stomach, afraid that I was getting myself in too deep. But I think Cody might feel the same way. Knowing that the person next to you might die at any given second makes you hold an attachment to them. I felt my heart falling, and it was falling fast.

I opened my eyes groggily, to see Cody's face leaning over me. “Good morning sunshine,” He sang with a

smile on his face. “I have some pop-tarts for you.” He grabbed my hand and helped me sit up. Selma, Aundrea and Rich were up eating cereal bars and pop-tarts; Aundrea smacking her lips with every bite.

I looked around for Durbin who was no where to be seen. “Don't you dare tell me you let him go Rich,” I threw a glare at him and leaned back onto my hands.

“I didn't really let him go,” Rich glanced down to hide his embarrassment. “I wandered off a couple of aisles down and picked up that wind-up radio.” He motioned to the radio with a long antennae and crank in the back. “I figured we needed it, to see if we hear anything about the safe camp.” Rich shrugged his shoulders. “When I got back he was gone. I was just thankful yall were all okay. God, I could slap myself right now.” Rich's cheeks flushed. How could I have ever been angry with this man? He's just always trying to do good.

“Well,” I said with a light tone. “On the bright side, we don't have to worry about him anymore.” I turned to Cody. “Pop-tarts, please?” I held out my

hand. The package landed in my hand and I tore into the bag, savoring the chocolate-iced masterpiece.

Rich picked up the radio and turned the crank on the back until static broke through the speakers. He strung out the antennae and turned the dial, trying to pick up something. Three loud beeps sounded, and Rich stopped turning.

“This is Vivian Hoff, from the Safe Camp, outside of Springfield,” the woman's voice rang. We all exchanged glances then turned our attention back to the radio. “We have a camp that is infection free and has food, water, medical attention, and a cure.” I heard a gasp from Selma. Vivian's voice raised in excitement.“If anyone listening has B Positive blood; you are the cure. We need you. Our capacity limits only allow us twenty-five more spots, so please, hurry.” Her voice was cut off by static.

“Well,” Rich huffed, turning the radio off. “They sure filled up fast.”

“Let's go,” Selma said shakily. “We have to get there before it's too late. We can't live like this.” She turned and kissed her daughter on the forehead.

“I wanna sleep in a tent!” Aundrea said standing to jump. “That'd be so cool!” She giggled.

I smiled to myself and started to roll up my sleeping bag, tossing the empty pop-tart wrapper to the side. The others started to pack up there stuff while Selma tried to calm down Aundrea who was skipping around chanting 'tent'.

Cody snuck in a quick kiss before I slung my backpack around my shoulders. He smiled and handed me my trusty chair leg. I gripped the end of it and yanked him closer to me planting a hard kiss on his lips.

“You know,” Rich chuckled, breaking Cody and I apart. Cody's cheeks flushed pink. “There is a four-year-old over there.”

“She's too busy to notice anyways,” I shrugged my shoulders glancing at Aundrea. She had moved onto dancing and it was absolutely adorable. How could a child be this unafraid?

We started to make the trek back towards the front doors of the Walmart. We passed by the pharmacy,

the food, and when we made it by the checkout aisles, I snagged a Reese's from the rack and stuck it in my backpack.

My heart stopped as we rounded the corner. Durbin was stumbling around the front door. He had a cigarette hanging by his mouth, and was staring at a door with a big black X spray-painted onto it. I'm guessing he'd finally finished his flask because it had been tossed to the ground a few yards away.

“Don't you just wonder what's behind that door?” Durbin said when he sighted us. He took a drag of his cigarette. Smoke blew out of his mouth as he spoke. “What do you think Desi?” He said, drilling his black eyes into mine. “Should we open door number one?” He made it sound like we were on a game show.

“I think the X means not to open it,” I said bitterly.

“Ah,” Durbin said raising his eyebrows. “But X can also lead to buried treasure.”

“Well, we aren't pirates,” Rich said, putting his word in. “And I have a bad feeling about that door.”

Before anybody could even react, Durbin opened the door. “Ha!” He yelped when nothing showed but darkness. “Nothing there!”

But it turns out that Durbin's buried treasure wasn't a treasure after all. Because through the darkness came a deep snarl, and a group of infected to go with it.

Chapter 16

Chapter 14 (original version)

When the four infected jumped out of the dark room, I gasped in horror. One was a little girl a little taller than Aundrea, with blood-stained blonde hair. She was the first one to run at us. Cody swung his bat into her face, making her death quick. My eyes stayed locked on the little girl's body laying on the floor, even when I heard Cody's bat make contact with another head.

I glanced up just in time to see an infected man running at me only a few feet away. I struck with my chair leg in front of me and watched as the nail pierced the man's throat. Blood squirted onto my cheek and I yanked the chair leg out of the man,

causing him to fall to the ground. I held the leg over my head and swung it down onto the man's head with all of my strength.

Then we heard the glass-shattering scream. I turned my head frantically to see Selma in the arm's of an infected woman, who was tearing at her shoulder. Aundrea was slowly backing up against the wall, shaking her head back and forth, trying to shake herself out of a bad dream. Rich plunged his knife into the back of the woman, who lifted her blood-soaked mouth to the ceiling and screamed. When Rich removed his knife she fell to the ground with a thud.

All of us stared at Selma and her shoulder, which was almost nothing but bone.

“Kill me,” Selma whispered. “We all know what will happen.”

“Selma, no,” I pleaded taking a step towards her. “It may not be the end. What type blood do you have?” I crossed my fingers and hoped she would say B Positive, then she would be immune.

“Aundrea and I are both O Negative,” Selma said with defeat in her voice.

“What about Aundrea?” Cody asked, his eyes were glossy , as were mine.

“Please take care of her,” Selma's voice cracked. She turned her head to look at her daughter who was standing against the wall with her face in her hands. “Aundrea, look at me.” Aundrea lifted her head; tears running down her angelic face. They locked eyes, silently crying to eachother, and whispered their goodbyes.

I couldn't help it. I cried with them. I saw tears run down Cody's cheeks, though his face never made an expression. Durbin was sitting on the ground with his head between his legs, looking down at the floor. Rich wiped his eyes and walked towards Selma holding the shotgun.

“Yall get out of here,” He said, without turning his head to look at us. “I'll be outside in a second.”

I walked over to Aundrea, who had slouched down to the ground, crying uncontrollably. I picked her up off

of the ground and held her to my chest. Aundrea kicked and screamed and punched my back.

“MOMMY!” She screamed as we walked through the front doors. “MOMMY, NO! I'M SCARED!”

Aundrea reached up and yanked my hair, causing me to scream and drop her. She stood up and ran back towards the door. The shotgun banged making Aundrea stop as she got to the door.

“Mommy..” She whispered as she collapsed to the ground. “Why'd you have to go?” She asked as tears filled her voice again. Cody walked over to her and picked her up, letting her rest her head on his shoulder as she cried.

I heard a cough, and turned my head to see Durbin leaning against a hood of a car. Rage pulsed through my veins at the sight of him.

“You!” I pointed my finger at him and ran towards him. “You miserable piece of shit!” My fist made contact with his cheekbone, making him squeal. I shook my hand as it throbbed with pain. “This is all your fault!” I set the pain aside and gave him an

uppercut to the jaw sending Durbin flying back onto the hood of the car. He wasn't even fighting back.

“That's enough,” Rich's southern twang interrupted my next attack.

“What!?” I screeched at him as my hands flew in the air. “Have you gone mental Rich?” I motioned to Durbin. “Selma would still be alive if it wasn't for him and his drunken ass!”

“Yes,” Rich said. “You're right. But he's out of liquor now.”

“Are you seriously sticking up for this man?” I took a step towards Rich eying him carefully. “Kill him!” I yelled through my teeth.

“I'm not killin' nobody who don't need to be killed,” Rich said with the shotgun dangling from his fingers.

“You just killed Selma, who was a good mother,” My fists clenched at my sides. “And you're telling me that you're gonna, let the man who killed her, live?”

“Yes mam'” Rich said.

“Rich,” I said more quietly, but still with a raw tone. “This man took your woman,” Rich's eyes widened. “He tore apart your family, fought your son, and just did something that almost got us all killed and you're okay with that?”

“I know you don't agree with my choice, but you had a choice too and you didn't kill him.”

“That was before he killed Selma,” I retorted back.

“I didn't kill her,” Durbin said with a new tone to his voice, regret and guilt. “I didn't want her to die.” He looked at Aundrea who was still crying into Cody's shoulder. “I didn't think there would be infected in there. Why would they be in a room like that?”

“Maybe that's what the big X was there for you dumbass,” I yelled at Durbin. The whole incident seemed to had sobered Durbin up, who was looking at me intently. “Don't even look at me,” I said fiercely. “You disgust me.” I turned in the direction of Cody and Aundrea who were now sitting on the curb talking. “And you,” I said to Rich as I walked by him. “I still think you're a coward.”

Rich laughed deeply as I made my way to Cody and Aundrea. They both looked up at me when I walked up to them. Aundrea's face was red from crying and Cody had his arm wrapped around her. He looked to me for help.

“So, Mommy's gone?” Aundrea whimpered.

I squatted down in front of her taking her hands in mine. “Yes, sweetie, Mommy's gone but she's not gone in here,” I said tenderly pointing to her heart. “Mommy needs you to be the strong girl that you are.” Aundrea let out a sob and nodded her head.

“I will,” She said wiping her fresh tears away. “For Mommy.” She stood up and wrapped her arms around me. I hugged her back and stroked her hair that had fallen lose from her pigtails.

“Come here Aundrea,” Rich called from a few yards away. “I have something for you.” He reached in his pocket and pulled out a Snicker's making Aundrea smile weakly. She drug her feet over to Rich and snatched the candy from his hands, tearing through the wrapper.

“Desi,” Cody said, grabbing my arm and spinning me around. “Are you okay?” He looked deeply into my eyes, trying to find the answer. I looked away, grinding my teeth.

Truth is, I didn't know if I was okay. In the past few days I've become an angry violent person. I winced as my hand continued to throb with pain from punching Durbin. I'd never felt so many emotions in such little time; terror, anger, hurt, pain. I glanced back into the eyes of Cody, and was reminded of another emotion. Love.

“Yes,” I whispered truthfully. “I'm okay now.” I took a deep breath and puffed out a gust of air, trying to be rid of my rage. When Cody's arms wrapped around me my body relaxed, folding into him. Then I blacked out.

Chapter 17

Chapter 15 (original version)

I woke up with my head bouncing against Cody's back. My eyes looked down at the moving ground, as he carried me. I lifted my head up.

“How long have I been out?” I asked aloud making Cody jump.

“About an hour or so,” He let me slide down onto my feet. “You just fainted in my arms.” My hair had came loose a little and he brushed a stray hair away from my face. “I wanted to wait until you woke up but Rich told me to just carry you.”

I glanced ahead of me and started walking beside Cody. Rich was walking alone in the front with the

shotgun in his hands, turning his head side to side on the look-out. Durbin was behind him with Aundrea hanging onto his back.

“Why is Rich letting him carry her?” I asked Cody quietly.

“She can't walk as long as we can,” Cody said. “She needs to take breaks. Rich has to carry the shotgun and I had to carry you so it seemed the only option.”

“But Durbin?” I asked skeptically.

“She seems to like him,” Cody replied with disbelief. “He's real good to her, especially after Selma died. I guess he feels guilty.”

“I hear you talkin' bout me boy,” Durbin said over his shoulder. His usual arrogance didn't touch his voice and he sounded like he was making a joke.

Cody ignored him and turned to look at me. “Are you feeling okay? You gave us a scare back there.” He had been carrying both of our weapons in his right hand and handed mine to me.

“Yeah,” I said nodding my head. “I think I was just overwhelmed by everything that's happened.” My eyes shifted to the trees that surrounded the road we were walking on. “Where are we at?”

“Just outside of Avoca,” Cody said looking around with me.

Avoca was in our city-limits, just inside of the forest that surrounded our home town. I remember driving with my mother to Springfield for shopping trips; one of the pleasant memories I had of my mother.

"So how long til we're to Springfield do you think?” I asked, brushing my hair behind my ear.

"Well it's about a two-hour drive,” Cody replied. “Rich says about four days with rest stops and sleeping.”

“Where are we going to sleep?” I looked around at the wilderness around me as a chill swept up my spine.

“In the woods,” Cody replied. “You, Rich, and I will take shifts guarding. We can't trust Durbin enough to take on that kind of responsibility.”

“I wouldn't trust myself with my life either,” Durbin yelled over his shoulder, before breaking off into a scratchy laugh. Unfortunately, I thought it was funny too and I let out a chuckle before hanging my head in shame.

We walked for six more hours, stopping twice to eat a granola bar and fill up on water. Cody and I had talked the whole way and my throat was parched. He asked me about my friends and what I liked to do before the infection happened. He laughed when I told him about the time I forgot to put my car in park on the top of Knot's Hill. I had to run down the street chasing it, yelling for people to move out of the way.

I learned that Cody had graduated two years before me at my high school. He had been on the baseball team the year that they won the State Championship. Now I could see why he was so good with that bat of his.

“You know,” Cody said as we walked downhill towards a Camping Park. “I used to always see you at school when you were a Sophomore.”

“No way,” I said shaking my head. I slapped him on the arm. “Why didn't you ever say hi to me?”

“I told you that you make me nervous,” He laughed. “Plus you always had other guys following you around. I didn't think you'd be interested in me.”

“Oh whatever,” I said rolling my eyes. “I never paid attention to those guys. I would have gone out with you in an instant.”

“Who said I would have asked you out?” He asked looking away from me.

“Oh..” I trailed off not knowing what to say.

“I'm just kidding,” Cody laughed. “I almost asked you a couple of times I remember, now I'm gonna kick myself in the ass for not doing it.” He reached for my hand and kissed my cheek. I looked up and smiled at him.

We reached the bottom of the hill, when an overwhelming stench hit my nose.

“Oh my god,” I gagged. “What is that smell?”

“Rotting corpses,” Durbin said pointing to the camp grounds.

Tents lay torn to pieces across the site and camper doors had smears of blood running down them. I could see scraps of bodies covered in flies. I put my hand over my nose, trying to cover up the stench. We all searched around for infected that may be lingering around the bodies, but none were to be found. Where have they all gone?

“Can we go?” Aundrea whispered. “There's one over there looking at us.”

All of our heads turned in the direction of Aundrea's pointing finger. There stood a man by one of the campers; one of the biggest men I've ever seen. He had to be at least seven feet tall and his arms looked the size of the tree trunks next to him. His head was bald with bite marks covering it and dried blood caked all over his body.

Nobody moved. Nobody breathed. He stood there taking in deep breaths, his massive shoulders moving up and down. I've never seen an infected control himself like this and the tension was scary.

Without warning the man let out a wild scream and lunged towards us. A loud bang stopped him short; a spray of shotgun pellets burst into his chest, tearing the skin away. Blood instantly ran down his torn blue shirt. The man looked down at his shirt and looked back at us with a growl rising from his throat.

“Run!” Rich yelled turning around and sprinting down the road. Durbin threw Aundrea over his shoulder and took off with Cody and I following behind.

Our footsteps echoed off the pavement and I could hear the giant clomps of the big man behind us. The man was big but he sure wasn't slow. The snapping of his jaw made my feet swing faster and Cody kept up. I looked over my shoulder to see if we were out-running big man but instead he was getting closer.

“Faster!” I yelled to the group. “He's gaining on us--”

My voice was cut off when my hair was yanked from behind and I fell to the ground, my head bouncing hard off of the pavement. Cody stopped and turned around running at the man with the bat, but big man was already trying to crawl on top of me. I lifted my

feet and kicked him in face, hearing his nose crack. He screamed until Cody's bat collided with the back of his head. The man fell to the side of me and Cody continued to pummel his head until it looked deformed. Grunts escaped from his mouth with every swing. Quickly, I stood up and went behind him.

“Cody..” I said putting my hand on his shoulder. “He's dead.” But Cody gave a couple more swings to his head before turning around to face me.

He had blood sprayed across his face and into his hair. His gray eyes looked frantically over my body trying to find something wrong. “You're fine,” He sighed and wrapped his arms around me. “Thank God, you're fine.” His hand wrapped into my hair pushing my head into his chest. I could hear his heartbeat start to slow down as he held me.

It was then that I realized I would do anything to keep his heartbeat going. Even if it meant stopping mine.

Chapter 18

Chapter 16 (original version)

We ended up walking a few miles away from the camp and into the woods to be on the safe side. The sun had started to set as we rolled out our sleeping bags onto the forest floor.

"What about the spiders?" I eyed Cody, feeling chills swim up my spine.

"You're not afraid of killing zombies," Cody said with a smile on his face. "But you're afraid of spiders?" He laughed and I heard Durbin and Rich chuckle behind me.

"Hey," I snapped turning my head to look at the two of them. I tried not to laugh. "Don't laugh at me. It's a

serious phobia." I looked at Durbin who was laying out Aundrea's sleeping bag for her. "So how does it feel being sober Mr. Tough Guy?"

He brought his head up from his task to look at me. "Ain't so easy," He mumbled. "I've been trying to keep myself distracted."

"You know I'll never forgive you for everything you've done," I said hastily. "But you're more enjoyable to be around when you haven't been drinking." I heard Cody sigh next to me. "You don't talk as much."

"There's been a lot of things on mind," Durbin said looking away at the sleeping bag in front of him. "I sincerely apolo--"

"Save your breath," I said holding my hand out to stop him. I turned to Rich. "So tell me again why you didn't shoot him in the head?"

I felt Cody by my side, backing me up. Rich's eyes narrowed and looked between the two of us, worry in his eyes that Cody took up with me. "I done killed too many people in that war already," Rich said his

eyes now piercing into mine. "I'm tired of seeing the faces of the people I've killed in my dreams at night. I don't want to add anymore to that list unless I have too." Durbin shifted uncomfortably. "Besides, I could ask you the same question. Why didn't *you* shoot him in the head? You had him point blank." Rich's voice hushed. "You even started to pull the trigger."

I was shocked at the sudden audacity of Rich. He had always acted so sweet towards me and I'd loved hearing his southern twang. But this new tone of voice and accusation made me tremble. I caught my breath and said strongly, "He whispered something when he thought he was going to die." I glanced to Durbin who had turned his gaze back on me. "What was it that you were saying?" My eyebrows raised wanting an answer.

"That's none of your business," Durbin said through a locked jaw.

"Oh yes it is," I said rising to my knees. "It's what saved your god damned life, so yeah, it is my business."

"Why do you think--"

"Spit it out Durbin," Cody interrupted, anger rising in his voice.

Durbin looked down deafeated. "I said, 'See you soon'."

"See you soon?" I asked. "See who soon?"

"Josie," Durbin kept his head down, not wanting to make eye contact with Rich or Cody. "I was talking to Josie."

"How dare you even speak her name," Cody said, I saw his knuckles turning white at his sides. "My mother threw away her family on you and you didn't even care about her."

"I loved Josie," Durbin said. I thought I might have seen a tear forming in his eye, but before I could make sure, he blinked it away. "You know I didn't always used to be like this," He said his eyes pleading towards Cody. "Well, you never really talked to me, but I know that you knew I wasn't a drunk. I loved her, I still love her."

"I don't believe you," Cody said turning away from the conversation.

"Cody--"

"Durbin." Rich said. "I don't think either of us want to hear anymore about how you loved our Josie."

I felt red in the face at the awkwardness that hung in the air. It was quiet as I grabbed a can of chicken from my backpack and popped each individual piece into my mouth. Aundrea sat on her mat between Durbin and I eating tuna. She hadn't said a word since we were at the camp grounds. I reached up and ran my fingers through her hair, letting her know that I'm here for her.

When the sun went down a chill swept through the forest. It had been decided that I would take the first watch and the shotgun was placed in my hands. I sat up against a tree with my sleeping bag zipped up around me; the opening sat over my head like a hood. I'm sure I looked like some kind of giant caterpillar, but it was starting to get really cold.

Cody kissed me goodnight and laid down next to me draping his arm across my legs. I heard his breathing slow down and become rhythmic so I figured he was asleep. Aundrea laid on the other side of me, curled

into a ball inside of her sleeping bag. Rich snored lightly on the other side of Cody. My eyes had slightly adjusted to the darkness now so I could see Durbin who was sitting on top of his sleeping bag with his arms around his legs.

"Can't sleep?" I whispered to him.

"First night without the liquor since Josie died," Durbin's scratchy voice broke through the darkness. "Don't think I'll be sleeping tonight."

"Oh, okay." I said wanting to end the conversation. He didn't speak again, but I could hear him breathing.

The crickets chirped in the background and I could hear leaves rustling as the wind blew. I tried to distract myself by trying to decipher every sound I heard, but curiosity won over.

"So why did you start drinking?" I asked quietly. Then I added in, "If you don't mind me asking."

"I couldn't really cope with Josie's death," Durbin said. I could hear the quiver in his voice as he tried to mask his emotion. "Drinking took the pain away. It made me numb and I was able to sleep at night." He

turned his head to look at me. "If Cody died and you had something that could take away the pain, wouldn't you do it?"

I'd had my share of drinking and partying, especially the night before the infection. "Everything is so hazy when I'm drunk," I answered. "I can't think straight, see straight, nothing. If I were to drink all the time I wouldn't be able to remember him clearly. I'd want to look back on the time we had together, not try to forget." Let him think about that, I thought to myself.

And with that we sat in silence, apart from all of the sounds of nature going on around us. Everytime I heard a twig snap I got antsy, but it was comforting to know that there was someone up listening with me. Even if it was Durbin.

Chapter 19

Chapter 17 (original version)

“She's a tough girl ain't she?” Durbin's scratchy voice broke me out of my dream of Selma. I had been in a deep sleep since Cody took shift watching. I cracked my eyes open and saw Cody's silhouette still sitting next to me with the shotgun in his hands. His body shifted as he turned to look at me and I quickly shut my eyes again, acting like I was still asleep.

“She is,” Cody said admiringly. I felt his hand stroke my face, brushing my hair away. It took everything inside of me to stay still as my nerves shivered from his touch. “I didn't know she had this much in her.”

“Did she not show it before?” Durbin asked curiously.

“Well,” Cody said dropping his hand back to the gun. “It was hard for her in the beginning, losing the people she cared about. But then something just clicked.” He chuckled. “It was like she had an epiphany or something.”

“Do you love her?” I could hear a smile spread through Durbin's voice.

“I mean, it hasn't been that long at all since all of this started,” Cody sighed next to me. “But so much has happened. I find myself wanting to protect her with everything I have in me. Every time there's trouble I worry about her, *then* I worry about myself. I've seen that she can take care of herself, but I can't help it. There's something inside me that has to see her live. She's an amazing and beautiful girl inside and out and I can't let the world exist without her in it.”

I felt a tear leak out of my closed lid and heard a tiny drip as it splattered onto the sleeping bag. Butterflies flew in my stomach and a stampede started in my heart.

“That's romantic and all but you didn't answer the question,” Durbin laughed. “Do you love her?”

I commanded myself to stay awake to hear the answer, but my body won the war and I fell back asleep.

“Desi!” Cody was shaking me awake. “They're coming! Get up!”

I jumped up off of my sleeping bag in a frenzy, reaching for my chair leg. I saw a group of infected running towards us through the trees. I glanced around for Rich, Aundrea, and Durbin and spotted them running the other way. I hauled my backpack over my shoulders, leaving the sleeping bag behind, and turned to run with Cody right beside me.

I could hear the snarls and the snapping jaws behind me. They weren't very coordinated because every now and then one of them would fall to the ground with a thud, but they wouldn't stop not matter how far we ran.

My legs started to weaken and burn the farther we ran, but my adrenaline kept me going. I could hear Cody next to me as he tried to take deep breaths through his nose to avoid cramping. I turned my head to look at him the same time he turned to look

at me. We locked eyes and then pushed ourselves harder, wanting to be strong for one another.

We caught up with everyone else, but the infected were still running after us. Their snarls became deeper with anger and their jaws snapped more ferociously. It was like swinging a steak in front of a dog that can't reach it.

“Will they ever stop chasing us?” I managed to speak.

“I don't know,” Rich yelled back from in front of me. “But I ain't stoppin' to ask them!”

The forest floor started to go downhill and we had to slow our pace, so we didn't roll down. One infected tried to come at us full speed but tripped and fell down the hill, cracking his head on boulders and trees. When he got to the bottom we heard a splash.

“There's a river!” I yelled to everyone. “If they can't open doors, and they can't use judgment, surely they can't swim!” We reached the bottom of the hill and saw a slow moving river in front of us.

“Swim diagonally upstream so that we don't get carried down the river!” Rich said. He turned to

Aundrea. “Honey since you're going to be on Durbin's back, I need you to hold this high above your head.” He handed the shotgun to her and she raised it high in the air without protest. It was almost horrifying seeing the gun in her hands, but that was Rich being practical.

We all started running into the tide. Aundrea had strapped herself onto Durbin's back with the gun in the air and I had tucked my chair leg into the back of my shorts uncomfortably. I heard splashes as the infected barreled into the water behind us. When it was deep enough to swim I dove onto my stomach and propelled my arms and legs, pushing against the current. I didn't stop to look around until I got to the other side.

I had beaten everyone else so I stood up and shook my hair out of my face. I looked across the river and saw that the infected were drowning. They were flailing their arms and screaming. For a second they almost seemed like normal people, until I heard snarls coming from the river bank.

Across the river stood an angry infected man. While everyone else was drowning in the river, he stood glaring in my direction, snarling. He let out a scream before turning around and running back into the woods. Why didn't he dive into the river? Are some infected able to think for themselves? I cocked my head in thought.

Everything turned quiet as Cody, Rich, Durbin, and Aundrea made it up to the river bank.

“So they can't swim?” Rich asked in disbelief. “Well I'll be damned.”

“There was one that ran off into the trees,” I said, still looking at the spot where the man had been standing “Why didn't he jump in the water with them?” My voice trailed off. Cody wrapped his arm around me, breaking me out of my trance.

“He knew he'd be no match for you,” Cody laughed. “You're a fast swimmer.” His chest heaved as he panted from the exhaustion of running and swimming. I watched almost too closely as he pulled his shirt off over his head. His tan skin glistened with

water droplets, and I couldn't help but blush and look away.

Rich grabbed the gun from a half-drenched Aundrea who handed it over with no expression on her face. Durbin locked eyes with me and smiled, like he knew something I didn't. I gave him the middle finger, but he just laughed.

“Let's get going,” Rich said leading us into the trees again.

I wrung my shirt out as we walked, but my shorts clung to me as water dripped down my legs. Everyone's shoes squished as they stepped; squirting water out.

Rich spotted a road through the trees and we followed him to it. He looked around at the speed limit signs and a sign that had an ad for a restaurant ten miles away. “This is familiar,” Rich spoke looking back at us. “We're on Highway 74. If we can stay close to this road it will take us to Springfield.”

“Should we wind up the radio to see if we can get anything from the camp?” Cody asked. My eyes fell

on him and trailed over his shirtless chest. My heart skipped a beat and I had to stop my hand from reaching out to touch him.

“Don't really wanna risk it,” Rich said walking forward. “The static might draw some unwanted attention.” We all fell into step behind him. Aundrea walked beside Durbin, holding his hand, and I walked beside Cody, our arms brushing against each other's with every step.

We walked until the sun started to set, and we found a spot in the trees to make camp. Durbin handed me his sleeping bag saying he probably wouldn't sleep anyways. I thanked him and laid on top of it that night instead of sleeping inside.

We walked the next two days with barely a sign of infected. A couple were seen here and there, but we crept around them silently and unseen. Rich still wouldn't use the radio, afraid that there might be an ambush of infected, and Aundrea still hadn't said a word. One night I held her in my arms as I slept and she clawed onto my arm tightly, scared that I might

let go. This once fearless little girl had turned into a bundle of nerves since her mother died.

Durbin actually slept on the third night and woke up in the best mood he's been in since I met him. He picked Aundrea up off of her sleeping bag and twirled her around, hoping to make her laugh, but no smile brightened on her face.

It was the fourth day of walking and we knew we were getting close.

“Where do you think the camp would be?” I asked Rich as we passed a sign that said 'Welcome to Springfield'. Crows perched on the top of the sign; their heads turning to watch us as we walked by. Not very welcoming, I thought to myself.

“Well,” Rich said in front of me. “When we saw it on TV it had been in a big open area right outside the woods.” He turned his head over his shoulder. “I could see the trees in the background. Now I know there's no woods after Springfield so I'm guessing we are very close.”

“Do you think maybe the fairgrounds?” I asked hopefully. I remember going to their County Fair once when my mom had taken me shopping. We went by the fair as a treat for my birthday.

“Good thinking!” Rich said excitedly. He turned to walk down a gravel road. “Josie and I used to have a wind chime stand we ran during the fair. They flew out of there like there was no tomorrow. Josie loved her wind chimes.”

I glanced over at Durbin who had dropped his head in thought.

“How far down this road do you think it is?” I asked trying to take the subject off of Josie.

“Not too far at all.” I could hear that Rich was smiling in remembrance of his wife.

We continued to walk until the road took a dramatic drop. Stopping in our tracks, our mouths popped open at the sight in front of us.

There stood the camp, as I remember seeing on the TV. A tall fence stood surrounding the camp with barbed wire coiled around the top. A mass of

different colored tents lay spread out within the fence with normal people coming out of them. It seemed too good to be true, until we saw that blocking the front gate was a massive herd of infected.

Chapter 20

Chapter 18 (original version)

I stood with everyone else gaping at the camp. It's all over, I thought to myself. This is the end of the road. Cody's hand found mine and gripped it tightly. I turned my head and saw he had already been looking at me; a look of defeat wiped across his face.

His voice was solemn as he spoke, "What do we do now?" His eyes never left mine.

"Well," Rich's twang sounded with leadership. "They're not going to open the gates with all of those infected there. So I say we stage a decoy."

My head flicked over to look at Rich. "What kind of decoy?" I asked, narrowing my eyes. I knew someone would be leaving us.

"Someone's gotta get their attention," Rich explained. He motioned with his empty hand to the gate. "And run them out of there." A slight smile spread across his lips. "Kind of like reverse herding."

"And who do you expect to do this suicide mission?" I asked with a slight arrogance. Even though Rich's practicality kept us alive half of the time, I still didn't want anyone to have to die, and that is surely what will happen.

"Would anyone like to join me?" Rich raised his eyebrows.

"No," Cody said. "You can't outrun them with your leg, you would die for sure." He took a deep breath. "I'll go."

My heart stopped and I dropped my chair leg to grasp Cody's hand with both of mine. They trembled as they held on tightly. "No.." I said pleading with

him. I shook his arm trying to get him to look at me, but he only looked out towards the camp.

"The second it's clear you need to book it to the gates," Cody demanded with a deeper tone to his voice. Cody looked over at me blankly, trying to hide all of the emotion behind his eyes.

I glanced over at Rich hoping that he would stop his son from doing something so drastic. Rich's face had turned pink and his eyebrows furrowed in frustration. He reached in his back pocket and pulled out his picture of Josie, his eyes sweeping across it.

"I'll go with him," Durbin said, grabbing all of our attention. "I need to stretch my legs anyways." He walked over to Cody and gave him a slap on the back. "I think I might be able to run a little faster than you." He winked at Cody and gave him a smile, which Cody did not return.

"You can't go," I said to Cody, panic filling my voice. "What am I supposed to do?" My voice cracked at the end and I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from bursting into tears.

My eyes flicked from the camp to Cody, weighing my options. Nerves built up in my stomach and I felt my face go cold. "I'm going too." I said quietly.

Anger flashed through Cody's eyes. "No!" He yelled. "You're not coming with us!" I could see him start to break down on the inside.

I took a step closer to him so that our faces were only inches apart and looked deeply into his eyes. "I'm not just going to waltz to safety while you're out there running for your life," I said through my teeth. "I would never really feel safe while worrying constantly if you were okay. I'm going with you."

Cody's gray eyes bore into mine with such intensity he might have burned holes through them. His jaw clenched and I could hear his teeth grinding together as he tried to control himself. I could feel his pulse beat hard through the veins in his hands; I gripped them tighter.

"I'm going with you," I whispered again. I reached up on my tip toes and kissed him gently on this lips. "You can't stop me."

The shotgun cocked behind me, stopping my breath. I turned over my shoulder to see who Rich could possibly be aiming the gun at. The barrel of the shotgun was pointing straight at me. I let go of Cody's hands and raised my arms in the air as a surrender. My heart thrummed hard in my chest and I took deep breaths trying to calm it down.

"Rich," I said as calmly as possible. "What are you--"

"You ain't goin' anywhere with my boy," Rich said with malice. "I'm not gonna let him die for you."

I laid my arms back down to my side. "I never asked him to," I said keeping my voice strong.

"I don't think you have to ask him," Rich said taking a step closer to me. He still had the gun pointed right at my head. "He would die to protect you and that's not gonna happen. You're a sweet girl and I admire and respect you, but I can't let my boy die because of you." Rich's voice cracked and I saw him glance down at the photo of Josie that was still in his hand. "He's all I got left." The practical southern man broke down into sobs.

"And he's all that I have left," I said sweetly, trying to calm Rich down. "Just put the gun down Rich." I took a step forward, holding my hands out to take the gun. "You don't have to do this."

Suddenly, Rich quit crying and aimed the gun at me again. His finger went to the trigger. "Yes, I do have to do this to save my son." I saw his hand clench to pull the trigger. I closed my eyes.

"Stop!" Cody yelled. I peeked open my eyes and saw that Cody stepped in front of me. His arms bent behind him and wrapped around my body, protecting me. "What the hell are you thinking?!" Cody yelled to his father.

"Dammit Cody," Rich said with fury. "Get outta the way!"

"I'm not moving," Cody said firmly. "You're not going to kill her. Not on my watch."

"I'm sorry," Rich said with no apology in his voice. "But I can't let you be distracted by her any more. This is a life or death situation, and I don't think you

understand that. You're not thinkin' right with her around. You're willing to save her over yourself."

"Because I love her," Cody said softly, begging to his father. I felt his arms tighten around me as my body fell slack.

When he spoke those words my legs felt numb and it was hard to stand. I buried my face into his back and felt his warm skin against my face. My heart wrenched. And my mind screamed 'NO!'. This could have possibly been the worst time to fall in love, knowing that either of us could die at any second. *'But that is why you have fallen so fast* ,' my heart argued with my mind. *'You have to live your life to the fullest, and love with all that you have in you.* '

"You don't love her," Rich's deadly voice broke me out of my thoughts. "You don't even know her."

"I do know her," Cody retorted, anger rising in his tone. "Everything that's happened has made me closer to her than any regular dates would have. I know that I would do anything to save her. Isn't that what you do for people you love?" Cody's voice filled me with strength and I felt warm from my head to

my toes. Rich, however, hesitated. "Mom wouldn't have wanted this.." Cody's voice trailed off and I heard a sniffle from Rich.

"Give me the gun," Cody said, dropping his arms and stepping towards his father. I peeked around Cody and saw Rich with his head slumped towards the ground, as he handed the gun over to Cody. My body relaxed and I let out a gust of air that I had been holding in.

"I'm sorry Desi," Rich said through his hands which were now covering his face.

I didn't say anything to him. I just watched him as his body heaved up and down, rocking with every sob. My heart did ache for the man, but I would never forgive him for what he just tried to do. I don't think I could find it in me to forgive anyone that has pointed a gun at me.

I glanced over at Durbin, who had his arm around Aundrea. The hatred that used to fill his eyes was gone and I could see peace washing through them. He seemed to have changed since I'd first met him, but I will never forget or forgive what he has done.

My eyes turned back to Cody who now had his arms around Rich, saying goodbye. I walked over to Aundrea and knelt down in front of her.

"You've gotta be strong for Rich," I said quietly to her. "He's really sad right now okay?"

Aundrea nodded her head and spoke for the first time in days; her voice coming out a whisper. "Are all of you leaving?"

"Yes," I placed my hands on her shoulders. "Durbin, Cody and I are going to get the infected away from the gate so that you can be safe."

Without warning she threw herself into me, wrapping her arms around my neck tightly. She was silent as she held onto me. I hugged her back and whispered that everything was going to be okay. Then she let go and turned to Durbin.

"Bye-bye Durbin," Aundrea whimpered hugging Durbin's legs. His hand reached down and patted her back. "Why do you gotta go?" She asked looking up at him.

"I have to make up for some things that I've done wrong," Durbin said and looked towards the group of infected at the bottom of the hill.

I stood up and walked back over to pick up my trusty chair leg. Cody had let go of Rich and walked over to me. "Are you ready?" He asked, setting the shotgun on the ground. He stood straight and held my face between his hands. His eyes lingered over my face as if trying to imprint it into his mind.

"Yes," I said, not quite so sure. I started to feel sick, until Cody's eyes locked with mine. "I love you too," I whispered, with a hint of a smile. "If only it didn't have to end like this." I felt my eyes prickle as tears threatened to spill over.

"Don't" Cody whispered, his thumbs lifted and wiped the tears away before they hand a chance to fall. "Please don't cry." He pulled me to him and my face nestled into his warm chest. His fingers laced into my hair, holding me as close to him as possible. We breathed in and out together, trying to savor this last peaceful moment.

When he let go of me I almost burst into tears, but I bit my lip and stayed strong. Cody picked up the shotgun and motioned for Durbin to follow us. I didn't say goodbye to Rich. I did however, give him a curt nod and quickly looked away, acknowledging him in the tiniest bit. I saw Aundrea's figure, out of the corner of my eye, walk over to Rich and grab his hand.

Cody, Durbin, and I were silent as we walked. The closer we got to the gate, the louder the snarls of the infected became. There were soldiers lined up around the inside of the perimeter, armed with guns. One man closest to the gate saw us and nudged the soldier next to him, pointing in our direction. The second soldier took a good look at us.

"Hey!" He yelled. "We can't open these gates until these infected are gone!"

We stopped walking and Cody took a step forward so that he was standing in front of Durbin and I. "Yeah," Cody yelled back. "We figured that much out!"

A few infected in the back of the group turned to snarl at Cody when they heard his voice. Before they

could start running Cody cocked the shotgun and shot it into the air. The rest of the infected fell silent and turned to look at us. They were a mass of deformed men, women, and children with midnight bleeding eyes that were filled with hunger. One little boy let out a glass-shattering scream and started sprinting towards us, with the rest of them in tow behind him.

Chapter 21

Chapter 19 (original version)

When you know you're going to die, something takes over you. Sometimes it's fear or acceptance. Mine was neither. I wasn't scared to die, but I was not going to accept it.

We whirled around and raced towards the body of trees in front of us. Wind picked up my hair as I ran and I could see the sun begin to blotch out as dark clouds rolled by. Our feet thudded through the grass as rain started to sprinkle onto our faces. I looked up as I ran and saw a streak of lightening spark across the sky.

"Figures," Durbin grunted after we heard a crash of thunder. We had made it all the way across the vast field and to the line of trees. Durbin stopped abruptly and turned to face the infected. Cody and I stopped with him, grabbing his arms. We tried to keep pulling him into the trees but he wouldn't budge. Somehow we had managed to get some distance between us and the infected who were still running at us. I saw the hunger and anger spread across their faces, even from a distance.

"Durbin!" I yelled slapping him upside the head. "Come on! What are you doing?!"

"Just go!" Durbin yelled back, shaking our arms off of him. "I'll lead them away and yall run back to the camp."

"What?" Cody's voice rang behind him. "You know that's suicide."

"Just go!" He spun around and pushed Cody sending him stumbling a few feet backwards.

Cody's eyes widened and then locked on me. "Let's go," He held out his hand for me.

My eyes flicked from Cody to the gaining group of infected to Durbin. "Thank you Durbin," I whispered, placing my hand on his shoulder. "I forgive you."

Without saying anything Durbin sprinted back into the open field and ran to the right. "HEY!" He waved his arms as he ran trying to grab all of their attention. "Come on you son's of bitches! Come and get me!" They all locked onto him and changed direction.

I grabbed onto Cody's hand and watched as the infected trailed after Durbin, snarling ferociously. Tears filled my eyes, knowing what would surely happen to him. He couldn't run forever. A loud crash of thunder shook my body making me pop out a scream. I whipped my hand over my mouth and whipped my head to look at Cody who had a look of terror plastered onto his face. We looked back towards the infected to see if they had heard me, but they were now chasing Durbin into the line of trees opposite of us.

"Thank God," Cody whispered, relief washing through his eyes. He reached up and clenched the

hand that was covering my mouth bringing it down to our sides. "We're safe," He whispered and pulled me into his arms. I wrapped myself into him as the rain continued to fall on our bodies. I lifted my head up to look at Cody. His hair was drenched, dripping down onto my cheeks.

"I thought we were going to die," I said shakily. "For sure." I turned my head to look at the spot of trees Durbin had ran into and found it all empty of people. They must all be running through the woods now. "But Durbin..." I trailed off.

"There's a possibility he could survive," Cody said trying to be optimistic. "It's not very likely though." His head dropped in disappointment. I reached up and ran my fingers through his wet hair, brushing it out of his face. His eyes shined silver as they looked into mine. "I love you," He said for the first time to me.

My body trembled and my heart literally skipped a beat. I felt my face flush with color and I suddenly felt shy. "I love you too," I said sweetly, leaning up to kiss him.

Cody's body arched and he let out a painful scream. "Cody!" I yelled in panic looking around for what was wrong. I glanced behind him frantically and saw an infected woman with no legs, gnawing on Cody's calf.

In one swift motion, I grabbed the shotgun from the ground, cocked it, and aimed it at the woman. She saw me and tried to lunge for me. Her mouth wrapped around the barrel of the shotgun and I fired it through the back of her skull, splattering the trees behind her. I threw the gun on the ground and turned my attention back to Cody.

He dropped down to his knees, tears filling his eyes. "No.." He whispered to himself. "No..." Bringing his hands up to his face he let out a sob.

I dropped to my knees next to him, tears running down my face. I couldn't think of anything to say him. My mind went blank as I cried with him. Suddenly, Cody dropped his hands and looked at me. The rain poured down harder as we locked eyes.

"You have to kill me," He said, his voice sounding dead. "If you don't, I could kill you when I turn." The

sorrow and fear for himself had left him and was replaced with a fear for me.

"I—I can't--" I tried to speak, but my sobs interrupted me. Cody's arms reached out, grabbing my shoulders, trying to keep me still.

"Then you have to run," He reached up and wiped my wet hair out of my face, so he could look at me clearly. "Please," He begged.

"No," I said firmly, controlling my sobs. "I'm not leaving you." I glared into his eyes.

"You have to!" Cody yelled, shaking me a little. "You can't be here when the infection takes over!"

"I'm. Not. Leaving. You." I said each word through my teeth.

"Please.." He begged again, tears re-filling his eyes.

"What if it was me?" I questioned. "Would you be able to leave me?"

"No," He said shaking his head. "But that's different."

"No it's not," I argued. "It's the same—"

I was cut off by Cody's scream, as he doubled over in pain. "RUN!" He yelled as loud as he could.

I told my body to get up and run, but I couldn't do it. I stayed paralyzed where I knelt. "Cody?" I whispered, placing my hand under his chin. He lifted his head slowly, his eyes fixing on mine.

His once silver eyes were now a midnight black, and blood streamed down his face. A low growl rumbled in his throat. I fell onto my back and scrambled to stand up. Cody didn't stand up to chase me, he just watched as I made my way onto my feet.

"Cody?" I asked when he didn't try to eat me right away. I took a step forward holding my hand out. "Cody, is it still you in there?" I asked hopefully.

Cody's answer was a snap of his jaw as he tried to bite at my hand. I dropped my arm and whirled around racing back out to the clearing. I heard Cody running behind me, snarling and snapping his jaw.

"Cody!" I yelled over my shoulder. "It's me! Desi!" I tried to get through to him. I'd seen infected who still had some willpower, so maybe Cody was still there.

But he kept coming. I started to run past the camp and saw the soldiers lined up along the inside with their guns ready to shoot Cody.

"Don't you dare shoot him!" I yelled at them with a snarl of my own. They lowered their guns frazzled as to why I didn't want them to shoot him.

I had barely gotten past the perimeter of the camp when Cody tackled me to the ground, mud splashing onto my face. I rolled over so that I could look him in the eyes.

"Cody.." I whispered, as his infected eyes looked into mine. "It's me. Desi."

The growling and snarling stopped. A crease formed between his eyebrows as he glared down at me. His breathing slowed down and he cocked his head to the side as if in thought. My body shook with fear at the sudden silence from him. The foggy black eyes looked me over, trying to figure out who I was. But then something snapped in his head, making him start to snarl again.

Before I could even react, his teeth sunk into my neck and I let out an ear-piercing scream.

Chapter 22

Chapter 20 (original version)

My scream cut off into a sob as I realized what was going to happen to me now. Cody's teeth tore deeper and deeper into the nape of my neck, and I could feel the blood oozing down my shoulder and back. I kicked my legs and punched his back, trying to break myself free, but my body eventually went limp and I looked up at the clouds that refused to quit pouring rain. The world around me started to become fuzzy and I thought I heard voices yelling from the camp.

The pressure on my shoulder suddenly released making me gasp for air. I saw Cody's head out of the corner of my eye start to lift. Time felt like it had completely stopped, including my heart. I heard and

saw nothing else as Cody's eyes met mine. I watched his eyes slowly turn from black to his familiar silver.

My blood dripped off of his face as the rain attempted to wash it away. He lifted his arm to his face and wiped it across, leaving only a little red here and there. But I was still fading away. My vision blurred and I found it hard to keep my eyes open.

Cody brought his hands up to my face, cradling it gently. “No,” He whispered. A tear escaped out of the corner of his eye and fell down the bloody trail the others had flowed. “No, no, no, no...” His voice trailed off as he laid his forehead against mine.

“Cody,” I whispered. “You're okay.” It took so much strength to even talk and I panted for air.

“Because of your blood,” Cody whispered an inch away from my mouth. “Because of you.”

“I love..” I tried to say, but my voice wouldn't allow me to go any further. I vaguely saw around us a circle of combat boots. The soldiers must have come out from the camp.

“I love you,” Cody said to me, kissing me on my lips. “This is not goodbye.” I could hear his voice raw with emotion. “You're going to be okay.”

Suddenly, Cody's weight was lifted off of me and he was yelling. I tried to lift my arm out to him, to bring him back to me, but it fell down on the wet grass next to me. I moved my head slowly side to side, trying to figure out what was going on. I saw blurs of green and brown as soldiers moved left and right, some coming to me, others going to contain Cody.

I could hear him yelling and screaming over the stream of other voices in my ear. My head started to ache as I tried to cipher through the two. I saw a fuzzy outline of a woman next to me with red hair that I knew must have been Vivian Hoff. Something that she was holding in her hand gave me a sharp prick in the arm and made the world around me melt away before I fell into darkness.

Cody's POV

Firm hands held my arms behind my back as other hands grasped at me trying to hold me still. “Get off of me!” I yelled, kicking one in the stomach, making

him fly backwards. “What the hell are you doing?!” I screamed frantically when I saw Vivian Hoff stick a syringe in Desi's arm. Desi's face fell peaceful and her head fell to the side limply.

“What we need to do to keep her alive,” Vivian said handing the syringe to soldier behind her. She stood up and brushed the grass off of her knees. “She was wasting too much of her energy.” Stepping over Desi she walked towards me. “And how are you feeling?”

“I'm fine,” I said, shaking the soldier's hands off of me. “But what are you going to to with her?”

“Well,” She said thinking it was obvious. “We're going to close the wounds in her neck, give her some blood and nurse her back to health.” She gave me a smile that seemed too practiced. “She's a very special girl. We need her blood. She's the only B Positive person who has come here. The blood type is rather rare you know.”

I didn't like the tone in her voice. I flicked my gaze back down to Desi whose shoulder was now being wrapped up so that the bleeding would stop. I lifted my foot to go to her when a line of soldiers blocked

my view. My fists clenched at my sides as anger boiled through me.

“Where are you going to take her?” I growled through my teeth.

“To the medical tent of course,” She said flicking her wet hair away from her face. “You need to come too anyways and get checked out.” Her eyebrows tilted down and the smile fell from her face. “But then we need you to leave the girl alone.”

“What?” I asked, confusion in my voice. “Why?”

“She needs to focus on what needs to be done for her country,” Vivian recited. “Not focus on some romance that means nothing.”

“You have no clue what you're talking about,” I stepped closer to Vivian and looked down at her face.

She didn't flinch with intimidation as I thought she would. She held her ground and looked me deep in the eyes. “I know exactly what I'm talking about,” She spat at me. “And she's not going to be staying here anyways. There is another camp that is in more need of her and her blood.”

Fury swept through me and I felt my face hot with anger. “You can't make her do anything or go anywhere!” I yelled into her face, my arms flexed.

“Oh,” Vivian laughed. “The world is a new place. We can do whatever we want.” She turned and started to walk in a circle around me. “You see, there is no government, no police, not anymore. Us who run the camps, run everything.” She stopped to face me. She leaned in so that only I could hear her. “And there's not a damn thing you can do about that.”

Stepping away she turned to face the soldiers. “Take both of them to the medical tent,” She ordered. “But keep him far away from our precious Desiree.” Her head flipped back to look at me. “I don't want him ruining her departure.”

Vivian spun on her heel and started to lead the group back towards the camp. This woman had looked so friendly and inviting on the TV, but to me she was worse than the infected. I glanced around for Desi and saw that she was on a stretcher being carried by two soldiers. I took a step towards them and was shoved back to where I was.

My head fell back and I looked up at the clouds that were now starting to reveal the sun. My hair had begun to dry when we walked through the gate of the camp.

People were everywhere watching with wonder in their eyes. I saw Dad standing with Aundrea and saw him wipe away tears that had fallen from his face. I was happy that he was alive, but I could not take my mind away from Desi.

Vivian and the soldiers led us into the biggest tent in the camp. There were individual rooms, closed off by sheets and lit by lanterns. I sat in my own as a doctor stitched up my leg and checked my vital signs, making sure I was normal. I was brought water and some bread as I waited for someone to come tell me I could leave.

I was escorted out by a soldier and was practically thrown out of the tent. Dad saw me and ran up to me, but I only ignored him as I heard a sound I had been dreading to hear. A hellicopter.

Chapter 23

Chapter 21 (original version)

I opened my eyes groggily and saw a lantern hanging above my head. My gaze flicked around the room and saw that the walls were made of sheets and that I was laying on a tall cot in the middle of the room. I heard a beeping next to me and noticed that I was hooked up to a heart monitor. I watched for a couple of seconds as a machine charted my heart rate. A faint dripping noise caught my attention and my eyes shot up even higher to see an IV bag with a long tube that ended at a vein in my arm.

A scuffle of feet sounded outside the sheet in front of me and the edges started to open. I flopped my head back down onto the pillow and closed my eyes, like I

had been sleeping the whole time. The footsteps made their way into the room and gradually made their way towards my cot.

“Is she ready to go?” I heard Vivian Hoff's voice on my right side. I vaguely recollected a memory of her sticking a needle in my arm. The beeping on the monitor sped up when anger flushed through my body.

A man said on the other side of me spoke. “I've patched up her arm and she's had the IV for a while. She lost a pint and a half of blood so it was pretty close to being real serious. She definitely doesn't need to be walking to the helicopter.”

“I was planning on her being sedated anyways,” Vivian said matter-of-factually. “I know she wouldn't go without a fight. Her and the boy seem too attached.”

“From what that man Rich said, it sounds like she's some tough stuff.” The man scoffed with amusement. “A little thing like this can be that intimidating?”

“She will do brilliantly in the cages,” Vivian said admiringly.

I struggled to keep my body still as panic rushed through my veins. Cages? I asked myself. What kind of cages are we talking here? I heard the beeps of the monitor pick up in rhythm and a bead of sweat formed at the temple of my head. Feeling the drop slowly trickle down behind my ear, I willed my heart to calm down.

“She'll be awake soon,” The gruff voice of the man seemed very close, as if he were leaning over me.

I heard Vivian rustle next to me. “Here, give her this in about ten minutes,” She ordered. A shadow passed over my face as she handed something to the man. “I want to have her fully sedated by the time the helicopter gets here.”

“Yes ma'am,” The man said, and I heard Vivian walk away.

The sheet made a fluttering noise and I knew she had left. A small clink sounded on the small table next to me and a second flutter of sheets let me know that

the man had left. Slowly, I peeked open my eye to make sure the coast was clear.

When I didn't see anyone I slowly lifted up my head to peer around the room, my eyes landing on the table next to me. I reached out my hand and grabbed the syringe that now occupied the once vacant space. I swung my legs over the side of the cot and sat up, wishing I would have done it slower. My vision started to black out as my stomach started to feel woozy, the verge of fainting almost overtaking me. I took a deep breath and sat as still as I could while the feeling washed away.

I looked down and saw that I had been put in extra large green scrubs. A white bandage poked through the collar of my right shoulder, covering part of my neck and I realized that was where Cody had bit me.

Cody! My mind screamed at me. They were making me leave Cody! I gripped the syringe hard in my hand and slowly stood up off of the cot. I could feel the anger rolling off of me. After all I did to get here, they were just going to inflict more pain on me?

I reached into my scrubs and tore off the monitors that were sticking onto my chest. Closing my eyes, I gripped the base of the IV and yanked it out of my arm. Quickly, I put my fingers over the whole adding pressure to stop the bleeding. When I stood up however, I could feel the blood start to drip down my arm.

My body felt slightly dead as I weakly made my way over to the sheet that I figured was the door. I carefully brought my fingers to the edge of it and peaked one eye through the crack. There was a man about my height standing outside with his back to me. His head was shaved and I could tell by the newly growing hair that he had been balding on the top.

I opened the sheet more when I saw there was no one else outside and brought my arms toward him. I slammed the syringe into his neck and wrapped my hand around his mouth, pulling him into the room with me. I muffled the man's scream with my hand as the sedative streamed through his veins. When his

body went limp I plopped his head on the floor and stood up, brushing my hands off onto my scrubs.

I cracked the sheet back open to see if any soldiers were coming and then stepped out into the makeshift hallway when I saw that I was alone. I glanced right and left wondering which way to go. The hallway was lined with stretchers and random carts containing IV's and other medical items. I heard a loud murmur of voices coming from my left so I turned and let them be guide.

Every step I took took so much effort I thought I would collapse in the hall. I could feel my heart beat slowing as it tried to pump the lesser amount of blood in my body. Thinking of Cody made each step easier. I couldn't and wouldn't let them take me away. There was no way in hell was I going to sit and wait patiently in that room for them to come get me. They'd have to come find me.

A new sound made me stop dead in my tracks. The blades of a helicopter beating through the sky rang in my ears. I heard excited voices coming from behind

me and I broke into a jog, gunning for what seemed to be the exit.

I burst through the opening of the tent to see a mass of people looking up towards the sky. My eyes followed theirs and saw a black helicopter descending into the camp. The wind from the blades whipped my hair in front of my face as I searched the crowd for Cody. I saw him standing in front of me yelling at Rich.

“Cody!” I tried to yell, but my weak voice was nothing compared to the loud helicopter. I took slow shaky steps toward him, my knees wobbling with the effort. “Cody!” I yelled at the top of my lungs when I was a few feet away.

Cody whipped around frantically his hair flicking away from his face. His silver eyes met mine and he pulled me into his arms just as my legs gave out on me. He scooped me up in his arms and kissed my forehead.

“Cody,” I whispered as my eyes fluttered open and shut. “They're trying to take me away from you.”

“I know,” He said with his lips still touching my head. “I won't let them.”

“Give me the girl,” Vivian's icy voice made me shudder. “She's coming with me.”

“No!” Cody yelled, gripping me tighter. I buried my face into his chest, closing my eyes. “She's not going anywhere!”

The crowd behind Cody started to chatter, wondering what was going on. I began to drift away, and voices began to blur together and contort.

“There's no need to cause a scene,” Vivian laughed cold heartedly. “You can either hand her over or we will take her by force.”

I felt myself suddenly being tugged away from Cody's arms and I heard him him grunt with pain. I felt myself in new arms and snapped open my eyes. A husky hairy man was carrying me and I gave everything I had left to kick out of his arms. He gripped me as hard as he could, popping my bones and making me gasp in pain. I looked around him

and saw Cody trying to fight his way past soldiers to get to me.

His fist connected with one man's jaw before a butt of a gun bashed him in the temple making him fall limp to the ground.

“Cody!” I gasped for air and sunk my teeth into the arm of the man carrying me. He screamed and I fell to the ground with a hard thud. I arched my back on the impact and gritted my teeth, trying to contain my scream. I rolled my head to the side and saw Cody lying on the ground. Tears filled up in my eyes and spilled over, trailing down my cheek.

“I knew we were going to have to do this the hard way,” Vivian's voice sounded from above me. I turned my head to look at her. She was kneeling down in her pressed black women's suit. I could see the mud from the rain seeping into her knee. A syringe dangled from her hand.

“Why are you doing this?” My voice only allowing me to speak a whisper.

“You're services are needed in Vegas,” She said, acting like it was privilege.

“And I have no choice in this?” I asked through my teeth.

“Afraid not,” Vivian teased, twirling the syringe in her manicured fingers. “Participants in the cages don't usually go willingly anyways.” She smirked plunging the needle into my arm. I could feel the sweep of sedation almost instantly.

I woke in the helicopter, strapped down onto a stretcher. The vibrations shook me and I popped my eyes open to see Vivian's red hair shining at me. She was talking on some kind of phone.

“Yes,” She said, looking out the window. “I have the girl.” Her long fingernails drummed across her leg as she listened to a voice on the other end. “You're going to love this one. She's got quite a bit of spunk in her. She'll be good and angry too so she should put on quite a show.”

Vivian's head nodded and I saw her eyebrows furrow through the reflection in the window. “Yes, Turner

she's experienced with killing them. Yes sir. Be there soon.” She clicked the phone off and gazed out the window.

If I had the strength I would somehow manage to squirm out of this stretcher and throw her out of the helicopter, watching her fall til she hit the ground. She was worse than the infected, she had something sick of her own.

An infection has spread throughout America and I'm not so sure if this one can be cured. Even in a time when the world seems to be at its end, an illness of greed and barbarism emerges from the human race.

Vivian broke me out of my thought as she dialed on the phone and held the receiver up to her ear. I heard a muffled voice on the other end before Vivian spoke.

“Kill the boy.”

About the Author

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